


# The Querrils



STACY AUMONIER



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## The Querrils

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"Oh, don't let me go! Keep me here with you, Mr. Peter"

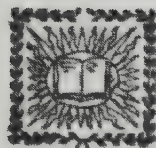


# THE QUERRILS

BY

STACY AUMONIER

Author of "Just Outside," "Olga Bardel,"  
"The Friends," etc.



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# THE QUERRILS

## CHAPTER I

### THE QUERRIL SET

#### I

**W**HEN the Querrils first went to live at Chessilton Heath they occupied one of the few houses scattered along the south side. The village was an amorphous segregation of villadom and tin chapels, turning its back on the heath. But some genius, foreseeing the possibilities of the place, set to work and laid out a golf course.

Now the result of this energy acted upon the interests of the inhabitants either as a blessing or a curse, according to point of view. For Chessilton Heath golf course became one of the best and the club one of the most famous, throughout England; and the village blossomed into an unbalanced but peculiarly vitalized town. A famous member of the Government established his week-end quarters near the golf club-house, and attracted around him a coterie of friends and

#### 4 THE QUERRILS

followers. A director of the railway company settled there, and his presence insured an improved train service with London. There arrived two editors of daily papers, a whisky magnate who was also a patron of the arts, a famous playwright, several lawyers, a reasonable number of actresses not living with their husbands, and a crowd of people who were doing things in finance, the motor industry, oil, art, and journalism. To these must be added odd, mysterious people in the wake of the cabinet minister, who lurked behind that jeremiad of activities which ululate at the back of the political arena.

The golf club-house was a center of considerable social activity, as well as the Dormy house, where members and their friends could stay. There one could dine, smoke, drink, flirt, play billiards, talk scandal, or promulgate schemes of social reform. On many a glorious summer day one might peep into the "mixed room" and observe mixed people playing bridge from early morning till late evening. Golf at times threatened to become a Cinderella of more adventurous games.

The attitude of the Querril family towards this social development was somewhat similar to their attitude towards the majority of abstract questions; that is to say, it was a compromise. They

professed a rather eclectic Bohemianism. They were always outwardly deploring this upward thrust of fashion. They were not fond of golf and seldom played. Nevertheless, Mr. Querril and Martin — the eldest boy — both joined the club and had their names inscribed on little brass plates on lockers. This gave the family certain rights and privileges. And much as they resented the invasion of their adopted village, they delighted to meet new people and to be friendly. Some one once asked Mr. Querril if he were a socialist, and he replied :

“Yes. Or, in any case, I believe in the basis of socialism, which is to be sociable.” ✓

And it was quite true. He was quite as genial, garrulous, and at home in the drawing-room of a bishop as in the shop of the man soling and heeling his boots. As a family, they dressed badly — with the exception of Magda. Mr. Querril himself dressed deplorably. But he could not conceal the fact that beneath his badly fitting clothes, his square-toed boots, his soft collar, and rather over-bunchy tie he was not only a gentleman, but what is *considered* a gentleman — which is a very different and more exclusive thing.

There was one matter upon which the Querril family would not yield to any kind of social dic-

tation. It concerned the decoration of their home and the disposition of their household gods. They possessed a few good pictures and several sound pieces of old furniture, but their collection was for the most part an almost incredibly ugly potpourri of mid-Victorian furniture, gimcrack ornaments, and photographs. This bourgeois hotch-potch was not due to an essential lack of taste—they were all keenly appreciative of beauty in other people's homes; it was due entirely to sentimental reasons. If some one vaguely hinted that a particularly ugly chair might be removed from the morning-room, Mrs. Querril would remark:

“I cannot let that go, darling. It belonged to my mother.”

Nearly everything in the house had a sentimental association. The mahogany dining-room suite, which Mr. and Mrs. Querril bought when they were engaged (he was twenty-two and she was nineteen); all their wedding presents; a black-and-gold writing-desk which “my darling Susie gave me when she broke up her home after poor John's death”; an ormolu clock which “Aunt Lena bought us at the Paris Exhibition”; a terrible collection of pastels which were hung in the drawing-room for no more excusable reason than that they were perpetrated by Cousin

Mildred. And then the photographs! They snapped up every available spare foot in the house. Enlargements of Mr. and Mrs. Querril in a wedding group, photographs of Mr. Querril when he was a Cambridge undergraduate, photographs of Mrs. Querril holding Magda in her arms, photographs of Magda and Evelyn together, in stiff print frocks; of Martin and Rodney in cricket flannels, of Peter in a velvet suit, standing on a chair; Magda with her hair up, Magda as she appeared for a fancy-dress dance, a family group taken on the tennis lawn. There were photographs in white frames, in oak frames, in mahogany frames. They flooded the staircases and even found their way into the bathrooms.

## II

It may appear irregular to describe people's furniture before describing the people themselves, but do we not, in effect, usually found our introductions in this indirect way? And how many people are there of whom we know only the furniture, the clothes, the manners, and the physical phenomena which hem them in? The rest may require the association of a lifetime or the covers of many stout volumes.

It is, in any case, not inappropriate to ap-



proach the Querril mind through the vicarious attitude of photographs and moribund heirlooms, for this aspect of them was not confined to the trappings of their physical existence but influenced their manners and entire mental outlook. A stranger had to fight his or her way through a bewildering manifestation of petty and unaccountable actions and accidents. Indeed, one had to live with them to perceive the many fine skeins of this emotional and sentimental quality which was woven into the fabric of their united lives. They were intensely but quite unconsciously sentimental. In theory they professed to abhor sentimentality. They derided it in novels or plays. They were simply blind to the extent of it in which they were saturated themselves. They were unselfish to an almost abnormal degree. They lived so much for each other, thought so much about each other, were so dynamically, frenziedly, unrelentingly unselfish, that the thing was always defeating its own ends. Each member of the family had little peculiarities and fads which had been discovered with great pains by other members, and then encouraged and catered to. There was a scrupulous endeavor to see that, though every one was loved and fussed over exceedingly, in-



cluding all their relatives and the people who came to the house, no one was loved or fussed over more than any one else. The result of this bred a kind of impersonalism. They became less like a community of individuals than an atmosphere of love and goodfellowship.

The visitor, indeed, who came to this very open house sometimes found it difficult not only to find his way through the photographs and furniture and then to differentiate between the members of the family, but even to determine who were Querrils and who were n't. The house was in a constant state of flux. Matters were also a little complicated by the fact that their friends and next-door neighbors, the Lemaire, were nearly always with them, and the two Lemaire girls, Annette and Joan, were about the same age as Magda and Evelyn. Mrs. Lemaire was a charming Frenchwoman, who had lived for twenty-seven years in England and still spoke English with a very broken accent. One reason for this may have been that no one helped her to improve her English, and in fact her daughters frankly encouraged her mistakes. They seemed unable to get over the charm of their mother. They would kneel on the grass at her feet and listen to her, and when she made some outrageous

slip they would laugh with delight and clap their hands, and Madame Lemaire would say:

"Have I said somet'ing w'ong?"

And then either Annette or Joan would kiss her, and say:

"No, darling. You talk like an angel."

Mr. Lemaire, who only came down for weekends, was a naval engineer. He was a tall, straight-limbed person, very Saxon, fair, clear of eye, somewhat reserved but studiously courteous, with a certain charm of manner not characteristically Saxon. And there was one Lemaire boy, Cecil, who was at Charterhouse.

The Querrils and the Lemaire formed the nucleus of a fluid state of social intercourse which had its headquarters on the Querril tennis court, or in Peter's studio, and which began to be known at that time as "the Querril set."

### III

That fortunate visitor we have spoken of, who may have made a prolonged visit as a guest of the Querril family, must soon have arrived at certain very definite conclusions. For instance, one may postulate that all men are equal, that love is impartial, that self-abnegation is the greatest of all virtues; but this visitor, perhaps

half-dozing between the crisp white sheets in the little spare bedroom overlooking the cherry-tree (the birds *always* had all the cherries), may have been suddenly brought face to face with the realization that Mother Nature detests all these premises in the same way that she is reputed to abhor a vacuum. She wants to get on with her job, and unselfishness does n't make babies, love is above all things partial, and self-abnegation has no place in the fields or heavens. What does that brazen demi-monde the sunflower care about the contortions of the ridiculous convolvulus? . . .

And so to this semi-sleeper there must have come a realization that beneath this bold bid for a universal mind and communion of love there still stirred the old pulse of primordial expression, little currents and cross-currents constantly breaking away from the main stream; above all, the unquenchable fires of individuality. In the first place, there were two—if not three—members of the family who quite unwittingly stood out from the rest. One could not think of the Querril family without instinctively thinking of Magda first. It may have been partly because Magda was undeniably beautiful, the only member of the family of whom the claim could be made; but it was not only that,

for Magda's beauty was one of those affairs of poise and glow without which all beauty is so much tinsel. Everybody told their troubles to Magda — a most dangerous quality to have. She had masses of light-brown hair, which had a way of catching the sun in little golden glints. Her skin was pale, almost olive in repose, but it glowed with a delicate warmth in action — and Magda was always in action, either physically or mentally. The face was round and rather broad, the brown eyes always searching for sympathy and giving more in return. She had a peculiarly beautiful neck and chin, and a way of holding herself which invited all your attention. You had to tell her everything, and hold her hand in the process, and perhaps walk with her slowly up and down the lawn; and afterwards you had to wonder what Magda would think of this and that. She quite unconsciously became the pivot of the Querril family, because of this insistent appeal of her personality, and the fact that she was always in action.

Evelyn, her younger sister, had Magda's atmosphere, but she was less finely modeled. It was as though the sculptor had set out to do something even finer and subtler than Magda, but the subtlety had been overdone and the result was rather nebulous. She had what was

called a pretty effect, but an effect somewhat disappointing on analysis. She was the youngest member of the family, openly sentimental, and more than any of the others perhaps a chartered embodiment of Querril foibles.

Next to Magda, Peter, the youngest boy, had the most pronounced individuality. He was shorter and stockier than either of his brothers; a grinning, jolly boy with a square chin and a mop of brown hair; always good-tempered and the butt of endless jokes, but with an eye that was not only humorous but reflective. Given to long silences and cryptic and surprising phrases, he differed from the others in many respects. Peter on occasions even lost his temper, and of course he was the favorite of his mother. (Heavens! she would never have acknowledged it!) He was nineteen at that time, and destined to become a landscape painter. He had a studio at the top of the house, which was also used as a music and games room by the rest of the family on occasions.

Martin and Rodney were twenty-six and twenty-five respectively. Martin was a singular counterpart of his father. He was angular and very plain. He had the same kind brown eyes and genial manners. He was equally short-sighted, and wore thick glasses, and made the



same atrocious puns. Also he helped his father in business, which was that of a publisher of works of reference.

Rodney had the reputation of representing the intellectual side of the family. He was better-looking than either Martin or Peter; tall, very thin, with something a little languid and distinguished about his air. He spoke well at times, and his jokes were less trite and his opinions more formed. He had just emerged from his pupil-ship to Sir John Ashbingham, the well-known architect in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and had taken an office in Grey's Inn. Rodney was the only member of the family interested in social matters, though he had persuaded both Martin and Peter to assist him with work at the Treves Settlement at Hammersmith, concerning the activities of which we shall hear more later on.

#### IV

It would be idle to pretend that tennis at the Querrils' ever reached a high standard of proficiency. No one played particularly well, and there was not infrequently a hardly concealed conspiracy to let the other side win, especially when Magda was playing in a set against "George," as all the family called Mr. Querril.



But the garden was delightful, and the lawn sunk between three grass embankments, the highest being on the house-side, with little circular beds of standard roses; and here Mrs. Querril would preside, like a figure of Perpetuity, in a solid wicker chair, surrounded by needlework which always occupied her hands but not her eyes, and novels which she never read, and glittering tea-things, and a wire-haired terrier called Potash, and occasionally the more elusive Perlmutter — a slim brown spaniel, who was, however, more frequently away on some active business concerning rabbit-holes, on the east side of the heath.

And to Mrs. Querril, this was the world, and there was no other. Or if there was another world, it existed only by reflection through the eyes of George, and Magda, Evelyn, Martin, Rodney, and Peter. She concealed beneath her placid eyes and gentle smile an attitude towards her husband and children that combined some of the qualities of an early Christian martyr with those of a Bengal tigress towards its cubs. She was always alert, watchful, intuitive, and blindly self-effacing.

In the evenings, or when the weather was bad, they would all foregather in Peter's studio, where there was a baby-grand. And there they would either play outrageous games or listen to

good music. Magda played the piano well and was something of a musician, and Peter was no mean executant on the 'cello. Martin played the violin with sufficient technique of a rather scrambling sort to justify the idea of trios. And occasionally Joan Lemaire would sing German *lieder* in a rigid soprano. Under the spell of the most mysterious and intriguing of the muses, the Querril family would cluster in little groups. And so harmonious, so reposeful, so inarticulate, would they appear, that they themselves resembled the strings of some old instrument as yet unplayed.

## CHAPTER II

### THE RAINBOW

#### I

**I**T was a Saturday afternoon in June. Mr. Querril, usually the most sociable of men, nipped out of the train at Chessilton Heath station and darted across the platform. With the casual nod of the well-known "season" holder to the ticket collector, he made for the path by the side of the station without looking round. His short sight was on occasions a great asset to him when he wanted to avoid people, and on this day he was particularly anxious to be alone for the twenty minutes' walk to the house. When faced with any disturbing problem he had great faith in those old panaceas — solitude and exercise.

His old blue coat bulged with periodicals and rolls of manuscript, whilst his long arms and bony fingers clutched further books, and rolls, and brown-paper parcels. The shabby gray felt cap was pulled down over his eyes, and one trouser was turned up at the bottom and the other not. It was one of his most successful

attempts to pose as a vagabond. It was, indeed, only the eyes which betrayed him, and from them emanated a spirit not only of a great kindness and gentleness but a certain distress and apprehension.

He hurried along until he arrived at the second field on the short cut across Mr. Catteral's farm, and then he dumped all his parcels on the ground and sat on the stile and lighted his pipe. It was very hot, and bees hummed in the young clover. Overhead an invisible lark was singing entrancingly. It was very delightful after town. Very delightful and pleasant to get away from the great city, where he was afraid things were not always like this; where there was suffering, dishonesty, malice — just to step out here so simply, and feel the fresh air, and to see the green fields and the gray distances, to walk up the lane to the house, and then to be greeted by love and laughter; to wash and change into flannels, and then to sit about among the roses or under the pergola, and to watch the children play tennis; to talk to his friends and discuss the latest books, to hear the merry quips and bantering of young people all dressed in white, with healthy, glowing faces.

The philosophic processes which had gone to the making of Mr. Querril's "sanctuary" in

those early years of the twentieth century had followed upon certain fluid and not unpopular lines. Mr. Querril considered himself an intensely modern man, alive to every social and religious development, and quite openminded. The only son of well-to-do parents who lavished upon him every care, and left him well educated on conventional Anglican lines, and well provided for; the inheritor of a solid and interesting business; something of a dreamer, with a passion for things intellectual for their own sake, never swayed by any impulse that he could not control, child-like in his affections and beliefs, he slipped into the toga of this pleasant family life almost imperceptibly to himself. It seemed a perfectly natural costume to him, and anything else was almost unthinkable. Poverty, misery, and vice distressed him unspeakably, and he had long ago decided that the problems concerning them were unsolvable. He treated the human race as he treated his own family — a body to be controlled by suggestion and "atmosphere."

In religion he called himself a Rationalist, and none of the children had had any religious training, but it was open to them if they cared to take it. They had been educated partly by a sequence of governesses and bland tutors, and partly at Benningdales' which, as you know, is a

famous school for coeducation and modern ideas. In politics he compromised with various wavering tendencies, and voted Liberal. The children at this time had taken little interest in politics, with the exception of Rodney, who was ragged by the others on account of his Fabian tendencies. We say "ragged" advisedly, because it was a tradition of the family to discuss flippantly the things that mattered, and seriously the things that didn't matter. The question of the color of a piece of embroidery for Evelyn's djibbah would lead almost to a white-hot feud, but any problem which concerned fundamental emotions was either ignored or passed over facetiously. The reason of this was obvious. Somebody's feelings might be hurt.

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Querril had ever put any restraints upon the children at all. Neither had they sought to instil into them any concrete conception of their place or purpose in life. During the years of adolescence they had watched them at times with anxiety and made attempts to coördinate their moral and mental outlook. But this was done more by example and suggestion than by instruction. They relied on atmosphere. And indeed the atmosphere of the Querrils might have made a sinner into a saint. During this period the boys called their father



"George," but he told them nothing. During this period the girls called their mother "darling," and she replied, "My darling Magda," and "My darling Evie," and she kissed them good night.

## II

And it had all been justified. They were splendid children. They had passed the most dangerous period. Mr. Querril had never thought or contended that these things did n't matter. What he contended to himself was that they mattered little, so long as children lived up to a moral code, that they were healthy, clean-minded and unselfish. And all his children were this.

Moreover, they were clever, on the threshold of great things. The boys would do better than he had done. This modern education was broadening every one. How much freer and happier this young generation was than his own had been! They seemed to get about more, to understand more. There was that settlement where the boys worked. . . .

And then Mr. Querril felt again that little stab of disquiet which had marred this pleasant day. He looked down at his parcels and sucked the stem of his pipe. The trouble had been this:

✓ Rodney was the moving spirit at the Settlement. It was an undertaking he took very seriously; consequently it was very little discussed at home. The boys would sometimes give an amusing description of some old lady who came there, or an imitation of the way the people talked. Mr. Querril did not really know what their activities amounted to, except that they worked amongst the poor on the river-side at Hammersmith, and each boy gave up so much of his time. The previous summer Rodney had rescued a youth named Stallard, when his father, a widower, had been sent to prison for seven years for forgery. They had found him work in Mr. Querril's office. He was a quiet, sallow-faced boy, rather pink round the eyes. He showed quickness and adaptability. But at the end of three months he was caught stealing a postal order for twenty-four shillings, from Mr. Querril's drawer. The owner was much distressed. He lectured the boy in halting sentences, expressing his sorrow, feverishly "suggesting" that he would be wiser and happier not to do such things, and then sent him back to his work. Six weeks after that he stole the pocket-book of Mr. John Frisby, the head clerk, and was again detected. There was very nearly a climax over that, as Mr. Querril was not there



at the time, and Mr. Frisby was all in favor of giving the boy in charge. However, excited conversations over the telephone ended in Master Stallard being once more forgiven.

But that morning things had reached a definite pass. A valuable old book on Byzantine architecture, which had been missing for some weeks, had been found by a police inspector in a second-hand shop in Notting Hill, and the bookseller had given a description of the lad who sold it to him which tallied identically with that of young Stallard. It was perhaps characteristic of Mr. Querril that, on listening to the details from the police inspector, a minor fact impressed him more potently than the major fact. The bookseller had given the lad fifteen shillings for it. Now, Mr. Querril had paid twenty-seven pounds for that volume many years ago, and it would be worth more now. The bookseller was also not an honest man. But he was protected by a code; the boy had no protection. It was very puzzling and distracting. The police inspector was greedy for a conviction, and Mr. Querril was in a position he hated — that of having to make up his mind. He humm'd and ha'd. His son would have to be consulted (Martin never went up to the office on Saturdays). And during these moments of equivocation there arose in Mr.

Querril an antipathy to the police inspector's face. It flashed through his mind that he had observed the same expression on the face of Perlmutter when watching a rabbit hole. Tolerable in a dog, but disgusting in a man.

"I could forgive anything except cruelty," he had remarked suddenly, with no relevance to the case in hand that the inspector could see.

No definite decision had been arrived at, and Mr. Querril had promised to deal with it during the ensuing week. He made his usual Saturday purchases of chocolates, knick-knacks and magazines, and caught his customary train.

C.

## III

And now he sat, a helpless figure amidst his problems and his parcels. What *could* one do for a boy like young Stallard? What earthly purpose would it serve to send him to prison or to a reformatory? With such a hereditary taint, what chance had the wretched boy? What would Rodney think? It seemed somehow ungrateful and inept on his own part not to have made more of the boy that Rodney had sent him.

He picked up a parcel of stuffed dates — for which Evelyn and Peter had a great fondness — and the "Fortnightly Review," and tucked them

under his arm with the rest. Then he continued his walk. A breezy neighbor passed him, clattering a bag of golf clubs.

"Hullo, Querril!" he called out.

Mr. Querril had not observed him. He turned and pressed the other's arm, and muttered:

"My dear good fellow!"

In the process he dropped the box of stuffed dates. He groped for them and murmured something about the heat. He seemed disinclined to pursue the conversation to any profounder depths, and went on his way.

He walked quietly up the gravel drive to the house, and let himself in. He could hear laughter in the garden, and Magda's voice calling out:

"Forty-fifteen. Now, Roddles, do serve decently."

He put down his parcels and went up to the bedroom and shut the door. Then he tiptoed across the room and peeped out at the window. Yes, they were all there. Rodney and Magda and the two Lemaire girls were playing tennis. His wife was sitting in her cane chair, sewing and talking to Mrs. Lemaire and a very stout man. Martin was lying flat on his back, looking up through the mulberry tree and chewing a straw. Peter was perched on the bank at the

end of the lawn, sketching in a diminutive sketch-book. Potash was sleeping tranquilly in an apparently perilous position. He was tucked right underneath the deck chair of the fat man. The shade there was undoubtedly effective, but the flimsy nature of its structure appeared totally inadequate to support the immense proportions of the sitter. If anything happened, it seemed horrible to think what might be the fate of the faithful Potash.

#### IV

It is further characteristic of Mr. Querril that in that moment, still smarting under the stress of his morning's experience, he enjoyed a little glow of satisfaction in realizing that the man was Decimus Postern. A love of celebrities was one of the little feathered vanities in the family quiver. Decimus Postern was a very old friend of the family, but Mr. Querril could never get over the pleasurable sound of the phrase, "My friend Decimus Postern." And Decimus at that time was by no means a figure to be overlooked or ignored. Creatures other than Potash were pleased to bask in his shadow. He was a celebrity in the world of letters, without having ever accomplished any work which justified a unique

position. He had attained it rather by weight of personality than by any original, creative ability. He was one of those people who take stage center by sheer bulk. Of vast dimensions, with a babyish face and large protruding eyes which looked out indulgently on the passing phenomena of existence, he adapted his person adroitly to an eighteen-sixty effect — with voluminous peg-top trousers, an embroidered waistcoat hanging in pendulous lines over his protruding front, a heavy black stock bound many times around a Gladstonian collar, and a tortoise-shell monocle in his left eye. His dark curly gray hair was going thin at the top, and when he laughed in his high tenor the great bags of flesh on his cheeks and neck shook and glowed, and the all-too-eager tears started from his eyes and added to the general humidity of his appearance. There was about him something attractively fantastic, as though some ironic alchemist among the gods had invented a thing that was neither spirit nor matter, but an adventitious composite of the two, retaining all the most nebulous qualities of the one with the most assertive, pornographic characteristics of the other.

At meal times he would eat voraciously, indiscriminately, but without any apparent sensual enjoyment; and during and between the mouth-



fuls quiver in his light tones of the beauty of Celtic twilight poetry, the curse of the Renaissance, the imagery of Persian sagas. Little whimsies and epigrams fell from his lips like leaves from an autumn oak, not in themselves of particular point or significance but transcended by the *ignis fatuus* of his personality. Opinions and epigrams were attributed to him for which he was frequently not responsible. One had only to know Decimus Postern to realize how many of the ancient myths originated.

Some one once asked Peter what he thought of him, and he replied: "He's too moist."

And there was more in this than its purely material application. Decimus was fluid. He flowed on and on. He was not so much a creative artist as a medium for mental liquid. Thoughts, ideas, and cunning arrangements of words poured through him. Words, words, words. He loved the play of them, the interplay, their fecundity, the power they had of eternally suggesting new and pregnant combinations. His works consisted mostly of anthologies and little volumes founded on some phase of life suggested by the works of a long-forgotten poet or romanticist. Among the irreverent of Fleet Street he was known as a "paste-and-scissors" artist. It was rumored that in those

comfortable offices of his on Adelphi Terrace he employed a small staff of bright young men, who spent their lives excavating and card-indexing. He certainly produced a goodly number of volumes for one who spent so much time sitting in the Querrils' garden, or taking the chair at interminable dinners. He lived a capacious bachelor's life in an old house that had been modernized by Lutyens, not a hundred yards from the Querrils', at Chessilton Heath. The interior was a combination of Versailles and an old Somerset farmhouse. It was filled with beautiful things often inappropriately placed. He lived, attended by an octogenarian housekeeper who was toothless, a pompous, middle-aged butler with the air of a permanent official, and a fugitive staff of odd cooks and housemaids. He entertained considerably and was enormously popular. And when everything had been given and everything taken away from the character of Decimus Postern, it was generally agreed that he was a very lovable person.

## V

When Mr. Querril had donned a white alpaca coat, and been received into the family group with the usual acclamations, and been kissed by



his wife, and given a chair by Evelyn, and disturbed Potash, the tennis set proceeded. The reedy voice of Decimus engaged in a bantering argument with Mrs. Lemaire acted as a kind of soporific. How different this all seemed to London, where there was sometimes "suffering, dishonesty, malice"! It would be difficult to talk to Rodney about young Stallard. It would have to be done, but he would bide his time. . . .

"Nature, dear lady," Postern was saying. "What greater bore is there than Nature? Fancy taking millions of years to evolve a turnip! It was not till, as a last desperate resource, she started making men and women that she began to turn out anything interesting at all. And even then the interest usually centers round the efforts of men and women to defy Nature, than with the humdrum efforts of Nature herself. Imagine the world without art, without cathedrals, without drama, without charity, or the fine frenzy to die for an ideal, and you have Nature—utterly exposed. She has certain silly notions about hygiene and physical attraction, but absolutely no discrimination between realism and idealism."

And then the musical voice of Mrs. Lemaire:

"O-oh, *you!* You do talk such ru-beesh! Are not men and vimen nature?"

Mr. Querril smiled. An adorable woman, Mrs. Lemaire; clever too. Dear old Decimus, how amusing he was! Quite insincere, of course. At least, generally so. But with a heart of gold. Oh, well played, Magda! A fine shot! What is Perlmutter doing among those young cabbages? Dear me! a lot of dead shoots among the roses already. To-morrow morning he must come out with the scissors and basket. . . .

Mr. Querril is destined to be a listener. Tea is brought out on a silver tray, and placed on an Indian collapsible stand of sandalwood. The tennis is finished. Evelyn is rolling Peter down the bank because she discovers that he has already found the stuffed dates and has eaten most of them. He is yelling out: "Help! Murder! Fire! Thieves!" The other boys have put on blazers and scarfs and are handing round cakes. Potash is very much awake, and Perlmutter has made a belated appearance. And over the tea-cups they laugh and chat, and the time-honored jest of some one accusing Mr. Querril of flirting with Mrs. Lemaire is met by his reply, which surprises himself more than any one:

"Well, why should I be the only one left out?"

He is in good humor after that, and they break

up into little groups. Decimus, Rodney, himself, drift upstairs to see a new painting of Peter's, and there he hears another discussion, somewhat illuminating. It comes about through Peter having had the audacity to paint a rainbow (a very faint rainbow touching a distant hill). And Decimus remarks:

"To be candid, I never can admire a rainbow. A silly alchemist's trick swung across the sky as though some one had been tampering with nature. A landscape become divorced from all sensibility. One instinctively wonders how it's done."

"There are rainbows and rainbows," mutters Peter.

"That's just it," adds Rodney. "A rainbow looks best, in my opinion, above a city. It wants a factory or a railway junction, somewhere where there's a lot of grime and dirt. The chimneys might have had something to do with the manufacture of it. In any case it strikes a grotesque note, and a city is no good without the grotesque to help it. A mass of gray uniformity, and then little discords and vivid reflections in unexpected places."

"Can any one tell me why it always looks so sentimental above a cathedral or a church?" asks Martin, who has just joined them.

"It was God's promise," says Peter, and they all laugh, giving Decimus the opportunity of cutting in with:

"As a matter of fact, it looks well above a city because a city is itself grotesque. One can't look at a herd of people living together under grotesque conditions without wondering how *that's* done."

"It's the rainbow which explains how it's done," continues Rodney. "The white light of the sun appears inexplicable, and then the rainbow comes dancing through a prism formed by the clouds and shows you exactly how the white light is composed. And it's the same with a people. The herd appears inexplicable, but when you look at it through a prism you find it's composed of green, blue, violet, orange, and yellow individuals."

"My dear fellow, tell me how you look at a herd through a prism."

"Oh, there are all sorts of prisms. Come down to our settlement one day, Dess, and we'll show you some."

Peter and Martin laugh, and the large man breathes heavily. Peter digs his thumb into his ribs, exclaiming:

"I'd love to see Dess at the Settlement! Fancy him sympathizing with Mrs. Stilling and

her ailments! or trying to persuade old Ben Cotton not to throw flat-irons at his wife on Saturday evenings!"

"Or," echoes Martin, "taking a dozen bundles of firewood under his arm to the Troons!"

(Who on earth are all these people? . . . So this is what my boys do. . . .)

But Decimus is shaking his fat forefinger.

"Wait a minute! Wait a minute! This is getting too involved. Is the white light of the sun any better because I see it explained in a rainbow? or the herd because I — am disgusted with it in detail?"

"Don't be flippant, Dess. It's a question of the ultimate good."

"Very well, then; I contend that I'm doing more good by writing good verse, or a critique of a bad novel, than by carrying bundles of wood to a thriftless charwoman."

"But suppose her thriftlessness, as you call it, were due to conditions for which we are all responsible? What would you do?"

"Leave her alone."

"And in the meantime —?"

"In the meantime, people are being born. They're eating, drinking, dying, making love, making fools of themselves; but, broadly speaking — making progress."



And why are they making progress? Because some one at some time has not let them alone. Because people whom you despise as interferers have butted in, made themselves unpopular, and got their way. Everybody who has done anything, from Jesus Christ to Lloyd George, has been described as a busybody and a meddler at some time. People don't want to be reformed. They hate it. The rich don't want to be taxed in the interests of the poor. There would n't be any taxation of this sort at all if certain fanatics had n't taken the matter up and got themselves intensely disliked. At the present time we are enjoying the advantages of laws, institutions, and privileges to gain which hundreds of meddlers and interferers have been stoned."

(Interfere! Yes . . . but how? What about the boy Stallard?)

Decimus is preparing an avalanche to destroy this plausible philosophy, when Magda enters the room. She is wearing an old green shawl. She puts her arm round her father's shoulders, and says:

"Are you boys coming? We're going for a stroll on the heath."

"Gracious lady," exclaims Decimus, "we know why you wear that shawl. It is not because a

warm summer's evening justifies it, but because it makes you appear adorable."

"Really! Do I need a *shawl* for that?"

"Heavens, forgive me! What a suggestion! And now please tell us. Where does a rainbow look best?"

It is necessary for Magda to walk to the window, to torture this large creature with her pensive beauty, before she replies:

"Out on the open heath."



## CHAPTER III

### SLEEPY EYES WITH CORYBANTIC DEPTHS

#### I

THE problem of "interference" exercised the mind of Mr. Querril on Sunday morning when he was pruning the roses. Was Rodney right? It was a very big question. He inherited a faith in liberty, freedom, "self-determination," leaving people alone. *He* had never interfered. And yet — what was he doing now? If he did n't interfere with the roses they would die, or in any case be very poor specimens. Who were the Troons? He had heard the boys refer to the Troons on several occasions. He believed that Mr. Troon was a dreadful man, a kind of hooligan. Did Rodney interfere with him? And there was a daughter. She seemed to cause considerable discussion. The boys said she was beautiful. It is more dangerous to interfere with a beautiful girl than with a hooligan father. Had Rodney done any good by interfering with young Stallard? It was so ingrained

in Mr. Querril to believe in every one, to trust every one, and most especially his children, that he would feel too sensitive even to discuss such matters. Every one had to work out his own salvation. His children could do no wrong. Experience was the racial cathartic. That this coming generation was going to be a generation of interferers, was quite evident. Perhaps they were right, perhaps they were wrong. His children called him George, to try to make him one of them; to make him feel younger than he was. It was an engaging piece of flattery, but quite unconvincing. A father can never be entirely intimate with his children. There must always be that frozen multitude of years between them, a barrier of solidified experiences. But these young people who were coming up — men and women, especially women — they were so much more articulate than they had been in his day. It was as though a dumb man, who had spent his life thinking, had suddenly found his voice. It was interesting for him to watch and listen — yes, that was all he could do now, listen.

“Aristotle’s ‘political animal,’” thought Mr. Querril, “has been stodged for so long on a diet of materialism and Bourbonism that the result has produced a kind of spiritual flatulence.” Mr. Querril smiled. He was intensely pleased

with himself for thinking of this phrase. It was not one he could repeat to the family. It was n't quite nice. But it was very pleasant to wander round the garden on Sunday morning, with his pipe and scissors, before the family were up. (They came down at most outrageous hours, commencing with Magda about ten and ending up with Peter about twelve-thirty.) The garden was never so beautiful as in the early morning. The leaves glittered with little pearls of dew, and the birds were so busy, and pleasant and beautiful thoughts came to one. And his wife (they always breakfasted together at half-past eight) would come out for a few moments and rest her hand on his forearm, and say:

"You're not getting your feet wet, are you, dear?" or, "Do you know whether Carters' has sent those delphinium seeds, my love?"

And occasionally Ptolemy the Second would amble nonchalantly across the lawn.

## II

Ptolemy the Second was a large, black, half-Persian cat. Alone among the whole of "the Querril set," he lived a thoroughly detached, pre-occupied existence. Unsociable, insolently beautiful, an egoist from the end of his vibrant tail to

the tip of his claws, he showed a supreme indifference to men or beasts. The whole of the Querril family and their attendants might vanish in the night, and he would not turn one of his glossy hairs, provided that other hands placed bowls of milk and rich and succulent foods in convenient places at regular intervals. He mixed very little with the family; indeed, he preferred the kitchen quarters, where there was greater heat, and also a generously built cook, who had a reasonable sense of her responsibilities to his royal demands. And she did not fuss. Ptolemy the Second detested fuss. He gave the impression that he selected the servants' quarter not for democratic reasons but because he considered that the Querrils were no better than their servants. They were a fussy, bourgeois crowd, and Ptolemy was an aristocrat of aristocrats, a snob of snobs. He toiled not, neither did he mouse. He did absolutely nothing. And yet he knew that, so irresistible was his beauty, so sure his sense of natural superiority, that nothing could be denied him.

Sometimes he would go and sit on the low stone parapet under the pergola, his large chest stuck out, his eyes shut, and his magnificent mustaches glistening in the sun. At such times, Magda or Evelyn, utterly seduced by his beauty,

would throw their arms round his neck, and, burying their faces in his soft fur, exclaim:

“Oh, you beautiful darling!”

Just a little of this he would tolerate, courteously but unresponsively. A little more, and he would put back his ears and draw away, with an expression which plainly said:

“*Really* you know! We Ptolemies, who ruled in Egypt — or was it Persia? — centuries before this wretched island was discovered — we don’t do that sort of thing!”

If the matter was carried any further after that, he would simply spring gracefully out of sight. His contempt for the dogs was almost theatrical. It was overdone. He never even glanced at them. He despised the way they were always working themselves up into a state of nervous excitement over the actions of these ridiculous, two-legged creatures. Perlmutter, evidently profiting by some early and misguided experience, always gave Ptolemy a very wide berth, but Potash would occasionally, in sheer excess of vitality, perform some clownish antic. Ptolemy would treat the inanity with the contempt it deserved (still not even deigning to look at him); but if by any mischance he should carry the thing to the extent of actual contact, there would be a sudden and terrible change come over



the scene. This soft and seductive lump of tranquillity would in a flash appear a vast black ball, glittering with teeth, claws, and green lightning. Through the menacing turmoil would come a sound like a sneeze, or the kiss of some portentous doom. The thing was beyond Potash. He was a plain dog, used to straight fighting, and he had no use for the black arts of Egypt. He simply bolted.

Curiously enough, the only member of the family for whom Ptolemy showed the slightest predilection was Mr. Querril himself. It was probably because he never attempted to stroke him. He used to talk to Ptolemy, and ask his opinion about gardening, and Ptolemy would come quite near and blink at him and seem to say:

“You’re not a bad old chap. Rather queer, perhaps, but you don’t fuss or interfere. There’s just a touch of the East about you — not very much, but enough to make you less intolerable than the others.”

And Mr. Querril would adjust his glasses, and say:

“Dear me, Ptolemy, what *are* we to do about this green-fly? We tried Killall last year, but it was quite useless.”

And the yellow eyes of Ptolemy would narrow



to a thin slit. He would seem to be looking into space, as though the only answer to such a useless question could be:

"In the East we leave things alone."

### III

Tennis went on intermittently all day on Sunday. And in the afternoon promiscuous people dropped in, some to play and others to talk. It was just before lunch that Mr. Querril keyed himself up to tell Rodney about young Stallard. The interview was less distressing than he anticipated. His second son took the matter philosophically. They were in the nursery garden, whither Mr. Querril had lured him, for the expressed purpose of devising a more satisfactory protection for strawberries than old tennis nets full of holes.

"I'm awfully sorry," Rodney said. "I hope it is n't bothering you, Father."

(When the boys called him "Father," it meant that both sides were reaching that embarrassing stage of self-consciousness when they would be glad to escape from each other.)

"For God's sake don't give him in charge," he added, "or fire him. If you can manage to keep him going for a week . . . we'll see what we can do. . . . I should think a couple of posts

here, with some of that wire netting that's in the tool-shed. We could cut out a lot of this stuff then. 'What do you think?'

Nothing more was said to Mr. Querril about the matter, but Rodney called Martin and Peter into his bedroom, and said:

"Blast that young Stallard! He's broken out again."

And Martin said: "I knew he would. It's inevitable. You've only got to look at his face. He'll have to go to a home."

"A home!" echoed Rodney, mournfully. "The very word is a travesty. Do you know what those homes are like? They're places where boys are encouraged to think that they're criminals. A kind of clearing-house for hell."

"We must find a decent home."

"I wish we knew of one. By the way, Pedro, did that girl, Emma Troon, come to the flat on Friday?"

Peter laughed lightly.

"Yes. What is she? She doesn't look English."

"No, it's rather rum. Both her parents are hopelessly English, her mother of the whining, charlady type, and her father a savage, an ex-seaman and stone-mason, always fighting, drinking, and throwing furniture about."

Martin laughed and seized Rodney by the lapels of the coat.

"My dear fellow," he said, "you don't mean to tell me you trusted Peter to be alone in the Pig-sty when Emma Troon called!"

"I know it was madness, but I not only trusted him but I deputed him to engage her to go there in the mornings to keep the place decent."

The Pig-sty was a tiny flat owned by the Querills in Westminster. It consisted of four small rooms and a kitchen. There was a double bed in one room, a single in another room, and a couch in the sitting-room. It was used by various members of the family on odd occasions when they spent a night in town. There were no servants there, but occasionally a woman was requisitioned to clean it up. It was in a dingy side-street, and the flat was always in a muddle. Hence its title.

"Well, this is a nice scandal," continued Martin. "I suppose he'll always be popping in there now when he's up at the Slade."

"Emma Troon is wonderful," said Peter, solemnly. "She has sleepy eyes with corybantic depths. There's some old ghost in her ancestry —"

"Oh, hell!" cried Martin. "Let's murder

him. Corybantic grandmothers! I'll teach him!" And Martin jerked Peter over backwards upon Rodney's bed, and proceeded to smother him with a pillow.

Any reference to the erotic passion was always treated by these brothers with the lightest of railery. There was a point beyond which one could not go. It jarred the family fastidiousness. Love was inherently the most wonderful thing in life. In the Querril atmosphere there was no place for the counterfeit presentment. Innumerable young men made love to Magda, and they found the experience maddening. The Querrils were so blindly happy in their unity that it never seemed to occur to them that two young people might like to be left alone. They even went out for walks in droves. And in the house and garden there was never any opportunity. Magda was as inaccessible as a queen bee surrounded by the hive. Martin had had various moon-calf experiences of a transient nature. Rodney dreamed of love as of some enveloping solution of all mysteries, to which he would consecrate his life. And Peter? No one knew yet quite about Peter. He was barely twenty, and was known as the philosopher of the family. No doubt in God's good time the thing would come to him.

## IV

The Querrils always had a cold supper on Sunday evenings and waited on themselves. It was an understood thing among their friends that the family kept open house on that occasion. Any one was welcome, provided they were prepared to be riotous, and to help themselves to cold chicken or beef from the sideboard.

Mrs. Lemaire appeared with a nephew, a young naval lieutenant, a good-looking boy who was entirely successful in adding to the general din. There was also a girl friend of Evelyn's named Alma Meteyard, with a schoolboy brother. The only unsympathetic note was the presence of Mr. Stride. The mere fact that they called him "Mister" showed that he was not one of the inner circle. He was a sallow, mournful individual, who had lived for years in East Africa and there had contracted some incurable disease. Mr. Querril invited him out of pity. His life appeared to be one eternal protest. He talked lugubriously all through the supper to Mr. Querril about the ways that rural committees abused their rights, about the ignorance and want of patriotism of the lower classes, about the folly and futility of the way everything was conducted in the country, the ineptitude of the government, the



apathy of the church, the viciousness of society. He appeared quite undisturbed by the general hubbub, but occasionally his eye would wander to the other — the noisy — end of the table, and he would mumble:

“M’— m’— yes. I like to see youth on the wing.”

No one quite knew what he meant by that, but he stated it as though he were tabulating one of the minor deficiencies of his own mentality.

His jaws had an unfortunae habit of clicking when he masticated his food, and in a pause Evelyn asked quite innocently what that clicking noise was. The laughter which greeted some trivial jest of Peter’s immediately after must have appeared extravagant, both as regards volume and period of duration. But Mr. Stride seemed quite oblivious.

After supper they adjourned to the drawing-room, and played a ridiculous card game called “Watch Billy,” which occasioned more noise and laughter. Mr. Querril took Mr. Stride into the library and endured a further dose of ominous forebodings of the future of South Africa. Then, after a time, he took his departure, and the rest went up to Peter’s studio, and Peter, Magda, and Annette played a Brahms trio.



Mr. Querril sat back in his easy-chair and listened. He was not very musical, but he loved to hear the children play. His mind worked in pleasant grooves under the spell of musical progressions. Little images danced before his mind, and vanished.

The room was in that alluring half-light, with the orange lamp-shade standing out boldly against the topaz of the evening sky; and the intent faces of the players, and the listeners grouped haphazard along the wall, appeared romantic. It was a painter's effect. Broad masses of simple tone and vivid notes of color. Moving and mysterious, like the music of Brahms himself. Melody, and behind it all life moving towards certain tremendous ends. . . . He observed Magda swaying very gently on the piano-stool, her whole body and face expressing the rhythm.

"A shade faster, darling," she whispered to Peter once, for Peter was always inclined to drag. And he frowned above his bow, and drew forth deep and mysterious passages.

"He's a good-looking boy," thought Mr. Querril, and something stirred within him, a kind of religious impulse, as though he desired to give praise to that Power that had given him a son

like that, a being with an indestructible soul, possessing powers and qualities beyond the comprehension of a father.

The Sanctuary! . . . It was all very beautiful. The troubles of the preceding day were quite forgotten, the shadow of that existence where there was suffering, dishonesty, malice, disappeared in this gentle light. The mystery of music was absorbing. One observed the compass of a scale, and then the thing got beyond one. Man was finite, but linked indissolubly to infinite potentialities. The keyboard expanded, revealed undreamt-of harmonies, only one became conscious that they had been there all the time, dormant. Man was like that, a keyboard on the outside, a god within. . . .

The usual discussion followed. Magda, her face flushed and excited, a strand of her beautiful hair breaking free upon her cheek, exclaiming: "Annette darling, don't you think you played this part a bit too straight? Peter dear, why *will* you always come in half a bar late here? Let's play this bit again, from the top of the page."

## V

It was just before bedtime that Peter slipped out into the garden alone. He strolled through

the pergola and came out on to the grass slope beyond the flower garden. The moon looked enormous above the sleeping heath. He sighed.

"How perfectly ridiculous it is!" he thought, after a while.

He threw away the end of a cigarette and leaned over the back of a wooden seat. Peter was barely twenty, an age when the emotions are straining at the leash. A cricket beneath the hedge had heaps to tell him. The heath looked lyrical in the silver light, like a Corot.

"But the moon is too big," he thought inconsequently. "Corot would never have painted such a big moon as that."

Then he laughed, and a phrase from the slow movement of the Brahms trio ran through his mind. At twenty one is avid to ring the changes of these newly found senses. It is all so surprising. Things are always darting into one and out of one, long before one has time to *think* about them. And when they have gone they leave some nerve quivering with a strain of sweetness or bitterness, as the case may be, but always the sense that they have never occurred to any one else in quite the same way.

And Peter, of course, was a philosopher. He was the wise man of the family. He was preëminently a Querril, but he lived more inside him-

self. He felt first and thought afterwards, and then turned his reflections over in his wise old head and examined them at leisure. He sat in judgment on them, and rendered them into epigrams, or masses of paint, or phrases on the 'cello. A fellow-philosopher had once said to him:

"I can only paint landscape that is haunted by the ghosts of dead lovers."

This had seemed to him ridiculous at first, but mature reflection told him it was right. It was another way of saying that a painting must be subjective, the happy hunting-ground of one's own emotions, a lyrical presentment of a place where people, who could love as he loved, had passed.

And it recurred to him to-night with singular force. He kept blinking at the heath and repeating:

"It's too perfectly ridiculous!"

The images of love were always with Peter. He had been brought up on a diet of little else. He had been enveloped, circumscribed, almost smothered, with love from his cradle. He had proposed to Annette when he was ten, and had been solemnly accepted. Annette was the embodiment of all that was beautiful and adorable in the Querril circle, the nearest thing to his

mother or Magda. Beautiful, companionable, accessible, she appeared the solution of all desires and heartaches. They bird-nested together, read the same books, quarreled and kissed. The stars could not have predestined a more desirable communion.

And then, suddenly, this other thing? . . .

Swift, volcanic, coming from outside, a whirlwind of disturbing movements, fevered dreams, questionings, and something bitter-sweet and dangerous and entrancingly — inevitable. An impetus that seemed to accelerate his vitality, to make him a bigger and more commanding personality. . . . As though nothing else really mattered at all.

Two bats swung in circles above his head.

"If the boys had only known when they were ragging me!" he thought.

## VI

He could see her now as he first saw her one day, two months ago, at the Settlement. She had come in to fetch some medicine for her mother. It was just the poise of her body which attracted him first, the swing of her strong hips, a certain languorousness of movement which seemed to indicate a suppressed vitality. One



felt that those limbs concealed the powers of greater activity. Like a panther in a cage. He noticed the shabby frock, and then the round, plump cheeks, and the masses of black hair tucked away beneath a small hat; and then, to his confusion —“ the sleepy eyes with corybantic depths.”

His first feeling was one of anger. That such a beautiful creature should be a slum-child! And then, when he spoke to her, he could not properly control his voice. And she never took her eyes from his, as she answered briefly, in low tones that had a Southern tang, making the cockneyisms attractive.

He had seen her only twice since then till the day when she came to the Pig-sty. It was Rodney's idea that they should engage her to keep the Pig-sty clean, and Peter used it more than any of the others. He went to the Slade School three days a week, and he kept most of his painting materials at the Pig-sty, and occasionally had a meal there.

Peter looked up at the moon, a puzzled expression puckering his philosopher's face. But the moon gave him no help, except dimly to reflect a vision of Emma Troon's face. He looked at the clump of fruit-trees in the Lemaires' garden across the hedge, and among their dim branches



the eyes of Emma Troon watched him appealingly. The night appeared charged with an immensity of hidden powers. And in some peculiar way he felt proud of being in touch with all these important forces. The large moon seemed to be setting the scale in some fantastic theater of activities, and his heart, beating rapidly, gave thanks that in all the endless dramas being enacted upon its many stages the motif was not always — philosophy!

He tried once more his dogged reiteration, "It's perfectly ridiculous!" but his mind was again busy with the memory of her visit to the Pig-sty.

He remembered that, as she was reaching up to a peg to hang up her hat and cloak, he had noticed her small and battered boots, and he had thought:

"How disgusting! I must get her some decent boots."

Her presence produced in him an emotional eddy, to cope with which he was utterly un instructed. It was something quite outside the Querril curriculum. And through it all was a streak of the intensest pity. His chivalry was quickened. He felt that somehow Fate had side-tracked this beautiful creature. There had been some horrible muddle and misunderstanding.

It could n't be right. When he saw her later in the morning, kneeling down and scrubbing a floor in the hall, he nearly cried out. When he left, he said :

" I should n't bother to scrub the floors, Emma. We — get a woman in to do that sometimes."

It sounded lame. He wanted to say so much more. He could see her now, looking up at him with her strained eyes, her breasts panting with exertion. She had answered :

" All right, sir."

He had hovered by the door, and added :

" Don't bother to call me 'sir,' Emma." She had not answered, and he felt that he had behaved dismally.

On the following day he saw her again. To his surprise she had on a new blouse and apron and — *mirabile dictu!* — new boots. She looked brighter and more cheerful. If not more communicative, she seemed in any case more responsive and watchfully alert to his presence, as though in this little pocket-drama she did not mean to play merely an objective part. Once she brought him the patent carpet-sweeper, and asked him if he would explain how to empty it. Peter had not the faintest idea, but he fumbled with the thing till he found out. And then he became alarmingly conscious of her presence.

Her head almost touched his, and once a strand of her hair flicked his cheek as they leaned together over the sweeper. Also he became aware of some faint scent about her. It was not the kind of scent that Magda and Evelyn occasionally used, but a distinctive, lingering perfume like the warmth of this summer evening among the white flowers and the mysterious fruit-trees. Just like this night.

Some one was moving on the terrace by the house. His father was coughing, and knocking out his pipe against the wall. He could hear his low voice talking to one of the boys, and then a light frock appeared, and his mother's voice rang out:

“Peter darling, are you there? . . . COCOA!”

## CHAPTER IV

### THE INTERFERER

#### I

**E**MMA TROON walked slowly along the Queen's Road at Hammersmith, carrying a string bag containing bread, matches, onions, blacking, and potatoes. The roadway was congested with pedestrians sauntering at the same pace as herself. Barrows and stalls crowded upon each other, whereat one might purchase cat's-meat, vegetables, fried fish, old iron, second-hand skirts and stockings, or brightly colored sweets. The shops, frowning across the intruding barrows, vied with each other in their miscellaneous assortments of goods and garbage and noise. At intervals, gaudily assertive public-houses glittered uninvitingly. A maternal Government had forbidden the taking of babies and young children into them, so their accommodating owners had built little tiled and covered-in passages, where the children might be left to play in the dirt and the draft. They were on

this morning crowded with perambulators and anemic, undersized fragments of humanity stridently querulous. At the corner of one street a fat man with a goiter on his neck was trying to sell a puzzle, and a man with no legs was strapped into a wheeled chair and playing a concertina. The street was littered with cabbage leaves and old newspapers. There was that eery smell peculiar to certain slums of London, which seems a concentrated odor of fish, beer, dirt, and perspiration.

None of these things impressed Emma very greatly. It was the atmosphere in which she had spent her life. She observed it languorously, as though conscious that, though she was in it, she was not of it. Perhaps, as Peter had said, there was some "old ghost in her ancestry." It was a boy at the Battenburg buildings (where she lived with her father and stepmother) who had first called her "The Watcher." It probably originated from her trick of standing on one of the open stone landings and looking across the iron railings at the river. She would stand there for hours at a time, like a person wrecked on an island and watching for a sail. Her large dark eyes were always watching. She searched the faces of every one she met, as though within her was some brooding problem of which they

might possess the master-key. She appeared very young, but overdeveloped, in the Latin way. Her movements were unconsciously picturesque, and she had a genius for keeping herself clean without encouragement, for making the most of her poor clothes, and for placing some little knickknack of color in the right place.

She watched the faces of every one, and most particularly did she watch the faces of her stepmother and of her father, and in this case she had good cause to be watchful.

She watched her stepmother with a kind of wondering contempt that so poor and spiritless a thing should be. And she watched her father with awe and terror, because she knew she had to study his moods, and that in certain moods he struck her, and then she had to be very watchful indeed. When he came home from the wharf in the evening, she never knew whether he would be sullen, hilarious, or maudlin. But she knew that in whatever mood he came, he would bring with him the reeking atmosphere of the taproom. His brain was sodden with drink. It seemed almost incredible that they should still keep him on at the wharf. It was probably because he was so strong, and liked to demonstrate it. Jim Troon could lift weights that no other man between Mortlake and Putney could touch. She



had seen him lift great blocks of stone without staggering. She admired him at such moments. She had a tremendous admiration for strength. She had been to cinemas occasionally. The hero was always strong. He rode wild horses, leaped from trains, killed people who thwarted him. . . . Strength was dimly associated with the elves of romance which danced at the back of her life. Emma had no intention of continuing this life forever.

## II

But the evening was close, and she felt depressed and weary. She walked across the asphalt court of Battenburg buildings, and up the stone staircase. At the third landing she stopped and looked out across the river. She could hear the shrill cries of quarreling children in the courts below. The river looked dull and menacing, with the great factory chimneys frowning ahead. A somewhat bloated sparrow, with its feathers coming out, settled on the iron railing and then fluttered away. Emma went up another flight and entered a door numbered 664. The stepmother, in a canvas apron and a cloth cap, snatched the string bag from her hand and cried:

"Come on, for Gawd's sake! Where yer been? 'E'll be in in 'arf an hour."

She got a knife, and helped Mrs. Troon to peel the onions, an operation which always made her eyes water. Mrs. Troon continued upbraiding her in little jerky sentences, and she did not deign to reply. One remark only impressed itself on her mind:

"It's quite time you was out earnin' yer livin'."

It had often struck Emma as remarkable that her father had never insisted on this. On the contrary, he seemed to hold some violent antipathy to it. Living as they did, from hand to mouth, and frequently with nothing at all to convey from the hand to the mouth, it would surely have been better for every one. She herself might be happier. She would in any case meet other people, enjoy new experiences. But when she suggested it, he flew into a violent rage and would give no reason. Indeed, he was never normal. He had many unaccountable traits, and like others of his moral fiber (or lack of moral fiber) he showed extraordinary cunning on occasions. He displayed a genius for finding out what his women-folk were doing all day, and he knew to a penny on what they spent the meager housekeeping allowance. The question of earning her own living had occupied the mind of Emma very considerably of late. She was be-

coming restless. Anything would be better than this bullying, nagging misery, the eternal hunger, and fear of physical pain, and always at the back of it the terror . . . the terror of something nameless and more horrible still.

There were times when she doubted whether her father was sane.

She learned from a girl in the buildings that she could get employment at a bottling factory. The hours were long and the wages twelve to fifteen shillings a week. Could a girl live on twelve or fifteen shillings a week? Some did, and some lived with parents, or clubbed together in twos and threes. Her friend also told her with a wink that some of them "picked up a bit in their spare time." Emma was sufficiently sophisticated to give a shrewd guess as to what this implied, and it did not horrify her. The only thing she feared was her father, and his physical violence. One day he might go too far. And she had within her some fierce instinct of self-preservation. She meant to fight for her life. She was adolescent, full-blooded, with an infinite capacity for enjoyment. And these qualities were being suppressed and threatened. Life was not all like this. She had seen things . . . heard what the girls said. Her dreams were colored with romantic tissues, in which peo-

ple moved softly in modulated lights, and music never ceased. Vague schemes were forming in her imagination already.

### III

The potatoes and onions were cooking. She sat on a high box and commenced to draw together the widening gaps in a pair of stockings. Mrs. Troon grumbled over the fireplace, and wiped three plates with a dirty rag.

Their tenement apartments consisted of three rooms and a diminutive scullery. One room was Mr. and Mrs. Troon's bedroom, the smallest room was Emma's bedroom, and the third room was a combination of living-room and kitchen. It opened on the staircase.

She had not sat there many minutes before Mr. Troon came in. She glanced at him. He was in his sullen mood, which was the least objectionable and least dangerous one. In that mood he would merely sit there without speaking, and content himself with growls and curses. The mood she most dreaded was his hilarious mood. He would come in singing and laughing, and be clumsily playful. And then, suddenly, some little thing would upset him, and his small eyes would blaze with anger. It was on one such

occasion that he had kicked Emma on the thigh, and struck Mrs. Troon with a plate and cut her temple. Consequently, it was almost with a sigh of relief that Emma observed him bang the door and throw his cap upon the table, and then sit heavily down in the chair by the fireplace. They never exchanged greetings, this family; and Mr. Troon produced a copy of the "Evening News" and filled his pipe with shag, and began to read. He read for ten minutes, and then he said:

"When's the blasted supper going to be ready?"

And then the trouble was that although the potatoes were virtually cooked, the onions would be at least another fifteen minutes.

Mrs. Troon began a whining complaint:

"I towld 'er to 'urry up. Once she gets down Queen's Road she goes gaping abaht, takin' 'alf the afternoon to get a few pennorth o' onions. Quite time she was out earnin' 'er own livin', I say. A great gal like that, idlin' abaht all day."

Mr. Troon listened to the harangue for some time, then he said suddenly:

"O Christ!"

And he picked up his cap and went out.

When he had gone Mrs. Troon sniffed, and continued:



"I towld yer 'ow it would be. And now there 'e is, 'e's gone off to 'The Cuttle-Fish,' and 'e'll come back Gawd knows what time, with a skin full."

"I can't help it," said Emma sullenly. "You never know what time he'll come in, or what he'll do, or what he'll be like. I don't care a damn what he does."

But she knew that Mrs. Troon's pessimistic prophecy was doomed to be correct. She sat there darning till the room got too dark to see to work. The onions and potatoes were cooked and dished up, and put in a pan on the hob. They lighted the gas, and busied themselves with little odds and ends. A barrel-organ was playing on the Embankment below. Children were still squalling down in the court and on the stair-cases. The room seemed to become suddenly like a prison. The cheap carriage clock on the mantel-shelf ticked out the truncated seconds. Time lost all proportion. The impatient hours jostled each other impetuously. There suddenly came to her a feeling of despair, a wild desire to escape from a nameless fate. She was consumed with a presentiment that something awful that she had dreaded was going to happen to-night, some climax to her unfortunate existence. She became terribly frightened.



Suddenly the thought came to her: "I will run away . . . now, forever . . . somewhere . . . anywhere. Anything will be better than this."

What was it the organ was playing? Some tune telling of gay lands and places where people laughed, and sang, and "walked softly."

"They pick up a bit in their spare time."

She smiled bitterly, and a sullen reflection occurred to her:

"After all, why bother to work from six to six-thirty if money can be made as easily as that?"

#### IV

In the hard school of her experience, every one got the uttermost for as little as possible. No quarter was given or expected. No one argued, philosophized, interfered or — looked back. If one succeeded, well, good luck to you! No questions were asked. If one failed — one went under, with a shrug of the shoulders. Who cared? Who cared? Who cares? My God! who cares?

She snatched her hat and jammed it on her head. She took her purse, and became aware that it contained one penny and five half-pennies. She swung across the room, mumbling to her stepmother:

"I think I'll just walk to the corner."

What did it all matter? Her hand was stretched toward the handle when she heard coming up the staircase the ominous sound of — her father's voice in song. He was in that most dangerous of moods — hilarity! She heard his footsteps stumbling and kicking the steps and walls. It was too late! She heard his key fumbling for the lock, the snap of the door, and the thick tones of his voice:

"Hullo, my dear, whereyorf'to?"

He did n't wait for an answer. He stumbled in and banged the door. Then in a sudden discordant voice he sang:

"They laid 'er in the cowl'd, cowl'd grahnd,  
Thet 's where they laid 'er — upside dahn."

He held on to the door for support and repeated this lugubrious refrain a dozen times without variation. Then, suddenly releasing himself, he screamed at the top of his voice:

"MAR-I-A!" and added incoherently: "Come now, let's 'ave some — grub!"

Mrs. Troon began fuming and fussing in the background, clattering with the saucepans, and Emma, her breath coming quickly, tried to slip by him at the door. But he was suddenly very alert, very suspicious:

"'Ullo, my ducky," he said, "where are you goin'?" Where's my pretty bird goin', eh?"

She tried to reply nonchalantly: "Oh! I'm just going to the corner."

"Oh, no, you ain't, my pretty. You come and sit down next to yer dear old father. When a gen'l'man comes 'ome in the evenin', 'e wants to 'ave all 'is lovin' family round 'im."

She stood there, looking furtively at the lock. And then suddenly his arms, like bands of steel, gripped her shoulders, and his drunken voice whispered:

"You 'll stay at 'ome with yer dear old puppa, my darling."

She struggled abortively with a potent blast of gin, beer, and tobacco, and then found herself being flung limply across the room, as the song broke out again:

"They laid 'er in the cowl'd, cowl'd grahnd."

She stood by the fireplace, quivering and feeling faint. There was a moment's respite. Mr. Troon was suddenly occupied with the scent of food. He fell into a seat and ate greedily the food set before him. For some minutes he ignored the others. He ate noisily, occasionally breaking into snatches of song, and shouting out at random blasphemies and incomprehensible re-

marks. After a time his hunger was sated, and he became aggrieved that the others were not doing justice to the good food that he had paid for. He became unreasonably angry with Emma that she did not return his paternal endearments. He said to Emma:

"'Ma, 'ave 'nother onion!"

Emma shook her head.

"'Ave 'nother onion," he insisted.

She still shook her head, and murmured, "I don't want it."

And then the small eyes blazed with fury.

"By Christ! you *shall* have 'nother onion."

He picked up an onion in his fingers, all hot from the dish, and clapped it on her mouth. And Emma screamed, and Mrs. Troon, waving her long arms, cried out:

"Don't be a fule, Jim. For Gawd's sake, leave the girl be!"

But the reaction had come. Jim was all out of hand. The spirit of Flaming Vengeance was abroad. His wife and daughter were two dirty, sanguinary trolls. They spent their dirty existences trying to thwart him in every way. They conspired together against him. His God, He'd see that they did n't come it over him. Old Castro had always warned him. What old Castro

did n't know about women was n't worth knowing.

(When Jim Troon was particularly rampageous he always talked about and quoted "old Castro," a person of whom Emma was entirely ignorant.)

It is possible that on this occasion this violent mood might have worked itself to some innocuous climax but for an unfortunate accident. In an hysterical moment, not conscious of what he was doing, Mr. Troon knocked out the contents of his pipe into a jug of milk destined for the morning's breakfast, and Mrs. Troon completely lost her temper. She screamed at her husband:

"Mind what yer doin', yer dirty, filthy old —"

And then Mr. Troon began to see red. He seized the jug and flung it at Mrs. Troon's face. That lady screamed and seized the frying-pan, as though she were going to assault him with it, and her husband gripped her arm and flung her across the room. He growled like a wild beast, and held the frying-pan himself and advanced upon her. And Emma, in a state of frenzy, groped her way between them. The terror she had been dreading was on her. She gasped:

"No, no . . . don't . . . don't!"

He steadied himself as though for some ab-

normal onslaught, baring his forearm. And then suddenly there came a gentle but firm tap on the door.

The three of them stopped, and looked round amazed, like animals disturbed in a game. Neither of them spoke, and the knock was repeated. And still they stood there. And then the door opened slowly. Emma, recovering herself first, pushed back her hair and walked toward it. In the doorway stood a young man.

## V

He was tall, calm, and well dressed. He held his hat in his hand, and said in a quiet voice:

"Does Mr. Troon live here?"

Emma replied, "Yes," very faintly, and he stepped into the room.

"May I come in and have a word with you, Mr. Troon?"

He shut the door quietly, and stepped by her with an air of calm assurance, and bowed politely to the three of them.

Jim Troon, his eyes blazing, like an animal that has been robbed of its prey, bore down upon him.

"Well, who are you? and what the hell do you want?" was his greeting.

The young man, who seemed slightly taken



back by this onslaught, pulled himself together, and smiled in a friendly way.

"I have called from the Treves Settlement —" he began.

"Then you can damn well go back to the — Treves Settlement," roared his host.

The young man made no attempt to move, but shrugged his shoulders questioningly. And Troon went up and swung his arms threateningly.

"D'year what I say?" he screamed. "Get back to yer —— Settlement. I know all about the —— Settlement! A crowd of dirty lime-juice spies. D'year what I say? Get out, or I'll smash yer dirty, ugly, —— face in."

The young man surveyed him steadily, and the thought flashed through his mind: "He's a moral degenerate, almost mentally deficient. Now how on earth do we stand with the law over a case like this?"

Out loud he said:

"I've come here entirely in your interest, Mr. Troon. We have no ideas other than to be of use. Of course if you wish me to go —"

"I tell you I wish you to go. Get out of my sight! You're thieves and spies."

The young man flushed, but he was keeping himself in hand. He changed his tone.

"You have no right to say that, Mr. Troon. It could hardly be correct in any case, or the police would not give us that measure of help and — protection which they do."

He laid a slight emphasis on the word "police," and Emma noticed her father's eyes contract in the way they did when one of his cunning moods possessed him.

The young man continued, still firmly:

"Our motives are entirely charitable. We even have the right to insist on being charitable, to interfere . . . when convinced of the necessity."

Then, as though the matter were settled once and for all, he added more genially:

"Come, come, Mr. Troon. You must be reasonable. It is true we know something about you, but we have no desire to spy. Surely we can make things a little more comfortable for you, and for . . . your family?"

"Me and my family are quite 'appy and comfortable, thank yer," answered Jim, surlily.

"I'm very glad to hear it," replied the visitor briskly. Then he glanced round the room and remarked:

"All we were thinking of was this. Next winter will be a hard one, and we are preparing for it. We are enquiring into special cases. Mrs.

Daubeney, who lives at 451, is bedridden, and her son earns only seventeen shillings a week. We have arranged to allow her a hundredweight of coal a month. And we have a certain number of blankets —”

“We don’t want none of yer damn charity,” cut in Jim stonily; but the whining voice of Mrs. Troon drowned his:

“Gawd save us, sir. Don’t you take no notice of ’im. Lord! we could do with a bit. What with Jim always bein’ on the booze, and that great ’ulk of a gal doin’ nothin’. S’elp me Gawd, it’s a ’ard life, sir.”

While this little scrap of dialogue ensued, the young man glanced at Emma, and their eyes met. She became aware at that instant of some strange inner disturbance, something that seemed connected with her pulse, her heart, her brain. She was extravagantly conscious of having her hat on and knowing that she had put it on in order to go out and meet that destiny of which she had a prevision. She dreaded that this good-looking young man would ask, “Where were you going when I came in?” He seemed to know everything. It was as though, in some mysterious manner, the winds of her destiny had suddenly shifted her course.

The climax seemed right here amidst these di-

sheveled plates and cups in the cold light of the incandescent gas. It was as though a messenger had come from another existence to fetch her away. She was faint from want of food. Her instincts, unschooled to any social understanding, cabined and directed by the eternal struggle for food and petty comforts, governed her mentality and way of life. And beneath their primitive expression there stirred at that moment, perhaps for the first time in her life, a feeling of shame. She was intensely conscious of herself in that squalid room, the table littered with newspapers and broken food, the cloth stained with beer and gravy, the broken chair, her own disreputable stockings lying on the box, and, perhaps more insistent than anything, that smashed onion which her father had clapped over her mouth, lying disgustingly scattered on the floor. She moved towards it with some vague instinct of concealment. She was shivering with the nervous strain of her tragic experience, when suddenly the onion seemed to be obscured by great blotches which raced each other in front of it.

She felt herself falling, and some one caught her. . . .

When she came to, she was lying on the bed in her own room, and the young man was bend-

ing over her and rubbing her hands. Mrs. Troon was hovering by the door, and her father was not to be seen. She felt very lazy and indifferent. She could hear the nasal whine of Mrs. Troon's voice, and then the young man saying:

"She'll be all right now. I'll send round some beef-tea and some other stuff."

He held her hand firmly and said:

"Well, little girl, how do you feel? Better?"

She tried to smile, and answered faintly:

"Yes, thank you."

He patted her hand and nodded. Then he turned again to Mrs. Troon and spoke:

"Well, if she is n't quite all right, soon, or if there's anything you want, send round to the Treves Settlement, Mrs. Troon."

Mrs. Troon appeared to be in her most amiable mood. She answered:

"Yes, sir. I will, sir, and thank you very much, sir. And for Gawd's sake don't you take no notice of 'im, sir."

As he was going, she added:

"If I *do* 'ave to call, sir, who will I ask for, sir?"

And the young man replied:

"Oh, any one will attend to you, but if you want to see me, ask for Mr. Querril. Mr. Rodney Querril."

## CHAPTER V

### EMMA GOES TO THE PIG-STY

#### I

THE mind of Jim Troon acted in cycles. At least, that was Emma's experience. She got to know by his behavior what was coming, and how long it would be before he got back to the point from which he started. She had foreseen that after the young man's departure and her own breakdown, that her father was arriving on the threshold of a period of cunning and intrigue. His behavior at the time was the tail-end of a storm, and the visit would give him food for reflection. He would never whine for charity as his wife had done. It was n't his way. But he would undoubtedly scheme to derive from the visit some benefit to himself. He enjoyed scheming and plotting to attain his ends, and if in the process he could manage to wound and hurt people, so much the better.

On the day following, he seemed much quieter and more amenable, and one little incident impressed her. The young man had taken out a



half-sheet of notepaper, and on it he had scribbled the name of a bottle of tonic. He had given it to Mrs. Troon and told her to take it to a certain chemist, who would supply it free. It was for Emma. The medicine had been duly obtained, and both Mrs. Troon and Emma benefited by it. On the back of the sheet of notepaper was stamped: "Ballinger Court — Chesilton Heath — Surrey." In the evening she noticed her father pick up the half-sheet of notepaper, turn it over, and examine it carefully, and then he put it in his pocket.

## II

A few days later Mrs. Troon developed bronchitis. Emma did not know that it was bronchitis, but she knew that her stepmother was very ill, and certainly not fit to walk to the hospital. Immediately she thought of the young man with the kind eyes. Indeed, she had thought of very little but the young man with the kind eyes since his visit, but this was the first excuse she had had of calling. She spent two hours on her scanty toilet, and sallied forth.

The Treves Settlement was a tall, gaunt house in a poor street. We have said that Rodney was its ruling spirit, but this was not in effect quite

true; he was only the ruling spirit among the Querrils. It was really run by a small committee of whom Rodney was one. Its principal support was a Mrs. Basingstoke, the widow of a wealthy shipbroker from Yorkshire. Mrs. Basingstoke gave up the whole of her time, and nearly the whole of her wealth, to the Settlement. She was a plain little woman, who worked hard, said very little, and dressed shabbily. Several other people, like the Querril boys, gave up what time and money they could spare. The ideas of the Settlement were simple and unpretentious. They were, as Rodney once explained: "To make the best of a forlorn situation. To do in a small way what the Government ought to have done in a big way years ago. Such a place as ours ought not to exist; there ought not to be any need for it, but what are you to do?"

The Treves people were only doing what hundreds of others were doing — trying to blot up the puddles with blotting-paper. They sought out individual cases of distress and did what they could. They kept a record of comings and goings, proffered advice and received abuse. They received no recognition, and — in spite of what Rodney had told Mr. Troon — were looked on with suspicion by the police.

The only point of policy over which Mrs. Bas-

ingstoke and Rodney differed, quite amicably, was that of the question of interference. Mrs. Basingstoke had said laconically: "Never interfere, Mr. Querril. Do what you can, but don't interfere. I have been at this work for thirty-five years."

But Rodney had been at it for six months, and he was young and impatient.

"You can do so much more if you interfere," he said.

And he had talked it over with Martin and Peter, and his conclusions were:

"You *must* interfere. All progress is a question of interference. If I know a thing is right, I must assert it, and stick to it, and, if necessary, fight for it. If I see a man ill-treating his wife, am I to walk by on the other side? It's all nonsense, all this talk about leaving people alone. Jesus Christ, Martin Luther, Cromwell, Lincoln, Mahomet — all these people interfered, or we should n't be where we are to-day. Democracy is just beginning to scratch the surface, and democracy is going to interfere with individual life much more than autocracy ever did — much more than people think. Democracy is going to be a good red-hot interferer. Some people have an idea that when we get democratic ideals established there will be nothing to do but sit down

and enjoy the fruits of it, but, as a matter of fact, liberty demands a more exacting discipline than tyranny. Fancy not being allowed to sweat people, to exploit their brains, to amass colossal fortunes, to treat women as inferiors — fancy, in effect, money not being allowed to buy anything it wants!"

And so Rodney went about tilting at social and individual windmills. The chase excited him. He was quite fearless. He assumed powers that he had not got. He was quite unscrupulous in his mild mission to "do what he could." And on occasions he was enormously successful.

### III

Emma Troon was told by a lady in a little inquiry-office that Mr. Querril was upstairs in a room at the end of the passage on the second floor. Thither she went, and tapped on the door like a flustered bird. A voice called out:

"Come in."

She opened the door and went in, and then she had a disconcerting surprise. A young man looked up from a desk, and for an instant she thought it was the young man who had paid the visit. She advanced towards him and then suddenly realized that, although the eyes were some-

what similar, it was not the same young man. She stammered:

"Oh! I — er — I beg your pardon. It was Mr. Querril I wanted."

The young man looked at her very hard as he replied, in a gentle, purry voice:

"I expect it was my brother you met. He's not here to-day. Let me see; what is your name? Can I help you in any way? Won't you sit down?"

It was very strange. She could not keep her eyes from his. There was something warm and comfortable about him. He was shorter than his brother, but broader, and he looked stronger. She liked the wisp of brown hair which curled boyishly across his temple to his right eyebrow. He looked young, vigorous, with that flavor about him of another world, where people "moved softly"—just like they did in films. Her unerring instincts told her, moreover, that she was affecting him in some peculiar way. He looked flustered, as though inwardly cursing his shyness and awkwardness, when he desired so keenly to don the gay plumage of the dominant male. She sat down and said:

"My name is Emma Troon, and Stepmother's sick."

He answered something about it being "too



bad," and then made some tentative inquiries. But he was n't thinking a bit about his questions or her replies. He was looking at her hair, her eyes, and, rather self-consciously, at her shabby boots. He seemed to be thoroughly ashamed of himself that she should have boots like that. He said, after a time, that the settlement doctor should go round and see her aunt — no, her step-mother.

Yes, it was too bad, he said. There was a long pause after that, during which they just sat there and glanced at each other furtively. At length he said faintly:

"So there's nothing more, Miss Troon?"

"No, there's nothing more to-day, thanks," she replied. An appalling reply! The sort of thing one says to the milkman.

He walked across to the door with her, and shook hands. His hand was firm, and supple, and cool. She had never felt a hand like that. He said:

"Good-by. If there's anything more, you know —"

She tried to be calm, and like a woman of his world — the world of films — but she only succeeded in saying:

"I see. Thanks. Good-by."



## IV

That evening Emma was very busy with her needle. She mended her stockings and began to make up some old material into a blouse. She cooked her father's supper and left it on the hob to keep warm. The stepmother was sleeping noisily in the inner room. The doctor had been, and sent some medicine and a stone hot-water bottle, and with it had arrived a mysterious basket of fruit. Emma liked fruit, but her stepmother never touched it.

Her father came in later than usual. He seemed in a merry mood, but not noisily hilarious. Something seemed to tickle him exceedingly. Emma had never known him so good-tempered and possible. He even rallied her about the blouse she was making, and told her that Mr. Bennett at "The Cuttle-Fish" had inquired "'ow 'is pretty gal was." This seemed to amuse Jim Troon. He repeated it several times and slapped his leg. After supper he sat smoking his pipe and reading the newspaper. And then Emma became uncomfortably aware that he was not really reading the newspaper. He was watching her.

She continued sewing, and then moved about the flat, tidying things up. She moved silently,

like a large black cat. She came into the lamp-light, her pretty fingers busy with plates and knives, then she moved away, a dim and sinuous silhouette. Once she hummed a little tune, and her voice was full and mellow.

Jim Troon stared at the bowl of his pipe. Then he expectorated into the fireplace, and went out.

"Curse it!" thought Emma. "I suppose he'll come back very late, and smash the place up."

But she had no thought now of either going to the bottling factory, or of vanishing behind the mists of that other uncertain experience. She took up her blouse again and cogitated upon the possibilities of being able to raise a few shillings to get a new piece of material. The outlook was not promising.

Soon after tea her father returned again. To her surprise he was not unduly hilarious. In fact, he seemed abnormally normal. He put down his cap quite quietly, and once more sat down and read the newspaper. He asked one or two questions about the doctor, and at half-past ten he said:

"Oh, well, I shall turn in now."

Then he came up close to Emma and looked at the blouse she was making. He seemed rest-

less and strangely self-conscious. Suddenly he said:

"What's the good of makin' up that old stuff? 'Ere, go and get yourself a noo one."

And he put down ten shillings on the table, and went to bed.

## V

On her next visit to the Settlement, Emma saw Rodney, and her visit was fraught with dramatic consequences. She did not like Rodney in the way she did Peter, but he was easier to talk to. There was no self-consciousness between them. Rodney treated her like a child and called her "Emma." He was very fatherly and kind. When she had reported about the condition of the stepmother, he suddenly remarked:

"And how is your father, Emma?"

She looked up at him quickly and replied:

"Pretty middling, thank you, sir."

Rodney sat with his knuckles pressed together, examining her. At last he said quietly:

"Now, tell me, Emma, quite between ourselves — does your father . . . behave unkindly to you at times?"

Emma stared at him, and her bosom heaved. She felt uncertain how to answer. Much as she feared and hated her father, there was an animal

instinct to fight for its kind. She resented being forced into betraying him. She had the uneducated's fear of the power of the educated. She did not know what powers these mysterious people exercised, what rights they held, or how they meant to use them. (This one had spoken intimately of "the police.") At the same time, she did not believe that either of these brothers could do anything unkind. There was something about the way they spoke that made one want to choke. She looked on the ground, and answered in a husky voice:

"Yes."

He nodded his head, and continued in a soothing voice:

"I'm sorry. He drinks, does n't he?"

"Yes."

"Tell me, Emma, does he actually strike you?"

"Yes."

"And your stepmother?"

"Yes."

There was a pause, and then suddenly Emma broke down and sobbed.

"O Christ!" she blurted out. "Sometimes he's like a wild beast!"

The young man jumped up, and came over and patted her shoulder.

"There, there," he said. "Don't cry, Emma; don't cry! We'll see if we can't make things a little better. I'm so sorry. Now, you go straight home, and don't worry about anything. They'll give you the malted milk downstairs, and you take some yourself. It's going to be all right, you see."

He pressed her hands, and took her downstairs himself, and one of the ladies did her up a large, brown-paper parcel.

## VI

At seven o'clock that evening Jim Troon rolled out of the private bar of "The Cuttle-Fish." It was a fine evening, and two half-quarterns of gin mixed with a quart of ale conspired to turn his mind to thoughts of song. He stuck his hands in his pockets, and chanted:

"They laid 'er in the cowl'd, cowl'd grahnd!"

He had not gone more than fifty yards when he met a young man, who came straight up to him and said:

"Good evening, Mr. Troon!"

Jim stared at him, and recognized him as the young man who had called from the Settlement. He was in the mood to be uncommonly friendly. He clapped the other on the back and exclaimed:

"Hul-Lo! my dear boy, how goes it?"

And then the young man behaved very unfriendly. He didn't take the advance in the right spirit at all. He just stood there, and delivered himself of this harangue:

"I've got to tell you something pretty straight, Mr. Troon, and you must let it sink into your head. Listen to me. You're being watched. We cannot help you if you insist on getting drunk. That's your own affair. But if you ever again raise your hand against your wife or daughter, there will be serious trouble."

The instinct of Jim was a simple and primitive one. He looked at the slight pale face in front of him, and he thought:

"I'll feint with my right, and then bring my left across — biff! swish! and knock his blasted face through the middle of his neck!"

The conditions were ideal for such an operation, and his spirits attuned to the virile purpose. The young man's head was silhouetted against a mustard-colored wall, and the light was excellent. And then he inconsistently looked past him, and his eye alighted on the solid chunk of a sleepy policeman standing idly on the curb, not twenty-five yards away. He hesitated and growled:



"Whatcher talkin' abaht?"

The young man's face was very earnest, and his manner very emphatic:

"We do not want to interfere with you, but it's got to stop. Do you understand? You can do what you like, but your women-folk have got to be decently treated. There's to be no violence. Now, let that soak in, Mr. Troon, and don't be a fool. Good evening."

He turned, and walked deliberately away, and left Jim fuming by the mustard-colored wall. He emitted a string of unprintable oaths, hesitated . . . and then returned to the bar of "The Cuttle-Fish." Another half-quartern of gin would help to steady him, and perhaps give him an inspiration. He was well known in "The Cuttle-Fish," where he never lacked genial society, but on this occasion he replied gruffly to friendly greetings, and retired to the little room at the back, with his glass of gin.

He was choked with rage. He could not think or collect himself. He sat there smoking and sipping his drink. Stung by this outrage, he had been robbed of his natural need of satisfying violence. If he had been allowed at that moment to rend, smash or destroy something, this story need never have been chronicled. But he

had been thwarted at a climacteric, and his mind instinctively groped its way along its cycle of progressions in search of some weapon of retaliation. What particularly angered him was that during the last few days his brain-cells had been cerebrating toward some vague effort at reform. Not necessarily moral reform, but reform as regarded his own external behavior. He never intended to destroy these young men. He was going to use them, certainly, but a pleasant, harmless little game. . . . And now! a torrent of wrath rushed through his veins when he recollected how he had demeaned himself by being pleasant to this white-faced swine! His "women-folk"! By God! . . . He could hardly get his breath. Interfering lime-juice snarks butting into his affairs! The face of Jim must have looked horrible at that moment. In such matters, the old proverb of "an eye for an eye," etc., was not sufficient. He would have a hundred eyes for one eye, and a hundred teeth for one tooth. His hand trembled as he put down his glass, and from his jacket pocket drew out a half-sheet of notepaper.

## VII

Two mornings later, Emma once more ap-

peared at the Treves Settlement, and again saw Rodney. He smiled at her, and said cheerfully:

"Well, Emma, how are things going with you?"

"Much better, thank you, sir."

"That's good! Has your father been — more considerate?"

"Yes, thank you, sir."

"Not drinking so much?"

"No, sir."

"No violence?"

"No, sir."

"That's excellent. Now, is there anything else you want?"

Emma paused, and then remembered the object of her mission. She said in a low voice:

"Father was wondering last night if there was any light work you could give me. He says I'm not strong enough to work in a factory, or to go into a shop, but he thought there might be some light work here in the offices, or something."

Rodney looked at her, and then examined his finger-nails.

"Oh! I see. . . . Well, now, I wonder what we can do. There is very little work here except clerical work, and hard charring. Let me think."

He lighted a cigarette, and sat scratching with

a pen on a piece of blotting-paper. Suddenly he looked up and said:

"Look here: we have a tiny flat at Westminster. How would you care to go there two or three days a week, and keep it clean for us?"

"Yes, sir."

"You would? Well, we could arrange that. Are you doing anything this morning?"

"No, sir."

"Well, would you like to go along there now and see my brother? He's working there this morning. If you like, I'll ring him up in the meantime, and get him to make some sort of arrangement with you. He uses the place more than I do. How would that do?"

Emma gave a little gasp, and managed to say, "Yes."

And that was how Emma first went to "The Pig-sty."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE VOLGA BOAT SONG

#### I

**M**R. AND MRS. QUERRIL'S wedding anniversary was always celebrated with a kind of furtive pomp. Little presents passed unobtrusively. Mrs. Querril's sister Lena came and spent the night. She was a clean-cut old lady, who, as Peter said, "glittered with virtues." The Lemaires came to dinner, and this year there were two other male visitors, John Capel, the young naval lieutenant; and an American boy friend of Peter's from the Slade School. His name was Tony MacDowell and he came from Boston. He had a flat, monkeyish face, a slow drawl, and a great affection for Peter, whom he resembled in many ways.

No reference was made to the anniversary. It was considered too poignant a matter to talk about. Only when the girls kissed their mother, they added a little extra pressure and murmured, "Darling," in a voice which signified that they understood. And the boys were very playful

and "Georgy" with their father, as though anxious to impress him that he got younger every year, that he was more and more one of them. And the dogs — much to their disgust — received an extra grooming, and certain old friends and relatives wrote sentimental letters from various parts of the country. These letters were passed round and read without comment. Decimus Postern could not be present, as he was taking the chair at some literary club dinner, but he had called in the morning and kissed Mrs. Querril's hand and made a speech in his best Corinthian manner.

Mr. Querril was in excellent spirits. Mrs. Basingstoke had found work for young Stallard on the farm of a gentleman in Sussex who bred pedigreed pigs. The work was healthy and absorbing, and there was nothing to be stolen. The responsibility had passed out of his life.

He played "Watch Billy" with considerable acumen after dinner, and was delighted with himself for detecting the missing card three times under Capel's pack. Indeed, the young lieutenant was playing rather abstractedly. Tony MacDowell proved a perfect demon at the game. His face was quite expressionless, but his gray eyes had an unerring instinct for detecting the pack where "Billy" lay concealed. He ex-



plained that to any one who had played poker it was like pushing a baby over a precipice.

They afterwards again adjourned to Peter's studio. And in order that the emotions should not be too deeply stirred, trios and quartettes were boycotted, and the gramophone was turned on instead. Excerpts from musical comedies and ragtime were the order of the night, and some of the children did some sketchy dancing. And then George had to have "his piece." His piece was the "Volga Boat Song," sung by a Russian male quartette. It was a very beautiful record, and it always impressed Mr. Querril very much. He enjoyed music that was definitely descriptive.

He liked to half-close his eyes and visualize the Volga boat song. There was a great murky river, in the late evening, and a group of barbaric men were huddled in the bows of a boat. He could almost see the shallow bank, the long line of fir trees with the moon just rising behind them. Away in the distance were the dim lights of a large town that had been left behind. The rowers' faces could not be seen, but he could hear the rhythmic beat of their oars. The rowers were not singing. It was the group seated in the bows. He could feel the sway of the boat as their voices died away farther and farther across

the river. They would almost vanish in the mist gathering over the dark waters, and then they would appear again, their song sounding more resonant and triumphant. It was like the song of man's triumph over his unhappy fate. It was a love song surely, telling of the unquenchable fires that have burned through that long calvary of suffering, the song of Russia. It was very sad, very moving. Mr. Querril glanced round at his family, grouped happily in that beautiful room.

A very wonderful and mysterious thing — art! To be able to bring into the warm security of that nest the living vision of strange men and places; to be able to move the steady pulse of restraint and austerity into the wild rhythm of primitive emotion. And yet, after all, was n't all life moving to the same rhythm? Increasing and slackening, rising and falling, telling its little story, and then disappearing down the dark river?

The dark river! Mr. Querril glanced almost greedily around his family group, as though affected by a sudden gust of apprehension. There was a large group on the ottoman by the wall. Martin and Joan, Annette with her head resting on Peter's shoulder, Tony MacDowell sitting forward and frowning, and Rodney lying

back nonchalantly, with Evelyn leaning against his knees. His wife knitting placidly, and Aunt Lena sitting rather rigidly in a chair by her side. Mr. Lemaire standing by the wall, twirling his mustache and looking at his beautiful wife as though he had suddenly seen her for the first time, and had fallen in love. Yes, they were all there . . . at least, no, apparently not Magda? Apparently not young Capel?

## II

But there was nothing very remarkable about this. People would stray in and out, vanish for a time and reappear like the Volga boatmen. Mr. Querril was not disturbed. He continued smoking his pipe and listening to the music, sublimely unconscious of the fact that at that identical moment his daughter Magda was being held very tightly by a pair of strong arms, and that lips, when not otherwise occupied, were murmuring:

“Magda, I love you . . . I love you.”

And Magda was crying with the sheer wonder of it, the surprise, the queer and dangerous ecstasy, in a land enchanted, although it seemed to have nothing to do with the Querril world. On the very seat, at the end of the garden, on

which Peter had leaned, and observed that the moon was too large, and made other philosophic reflections, Magda was being held in a grip of steel. And it was not the grip alone which made her bosom heave. Life itself had rushed toward a sudden apostasy of Querril faith, something more moving and tremendous. And she was unprepared. She could only gasp:

"Darling, I don't know. . . . I don't know."

There was no moon to-night, but the stars were very busy, and the tall flowers nodded in the gentle wind. And the almost invisible person, who brought with him something of the disturbing and relentless character of the sea, insisted:

"Damn it! You angel, my leave's up to-morrow. Say yes. Say yes, Magda. . . ."

It was July, and the progress of emotional experiences which had brought Magda face to face with this distracting proposition had covered a period of three weeks, corresponding with the leave of a certain young lieutenant in the navy, where they are reputed to do things rapidly.

At first it had all been so simple. A new member of the Querril set, who could play tennis and make more noise than any of them, who entered into all the rags, was tremendously high-spirited, and yet tactful and charming in manner, altogether a delightful acquisition. Magda

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liked his steady gray eye, the clean-cut features and strong chin, and the keen way he moved, and the infectious way he laughed. It bucked up "the set" tremendously. And then as the days passed Magda realized that the steady gray eyes had nothing impersonal about them. They were not concerned with "the set." They singled her out and followed her every little movement. The strong chin and infectious laugh had a significance for her alone. And this was very alarming, and it became more alarming when she realized one night in bed that she would n't have it otherwise for the world.

And then this person had an arbitrary, domineering way of doing things that was alien to the set. It was as though he had suddenly decided that he was n't going to stand any nonsense about universal love and the brotherhood of man. He caught hold of her one evening and deliberately dragged her away for a walk on the heath *alone*. And when out of sight, he said:

"Phew! It's a treat to get you away from your family!"

And Magda answered:

"You must n't say anything about my family. They are darlings."

"I know they're darlings, but they're a damned nuisance when they keep you from me."



And that was the beginning of what might be called an intensive courtship.

### III

The boys were busy on week days, and Evelyn was attending an art school in the neighborhood, and so John made the most of those golden hours. He took Magda for walks alone, and trips on a side-car alone, and picnics alone, and even once up to London to a *matinée* alone. He was shameless in his campaign of unimpersonalism. The only people who might have been annoyed were Annette and Joan, at whose house he was staying. The affair was quite apparent to them, but they were too loyal to make any comment, and if it was going to materialize it would be too sacred to rag about. Only Madame Lemaire, who was his aunt, and of whom he was very fond (they always performed a ceremony of flirtation when they met and parted), said to him one night:

"Aw-h! my Jack-ee! He is haveeng a verree, verree nice time. But she is a verree, verree nice girl, ees n't she, my Jack-ee?"

And "Jack-ee" put his arm round her waist and kissed her, and said:

"Oh, you Frenchwomen! you can only think of one thing."



When the significance of John's advances and her own feelings in the matter had dawned upon Magda in their full significance, she began to take herself seriously to task. It was not the Querril way to be precipitate. It was all tremendously important. There would be crowds of things to consider. First and foremost "the darlings" (by which she meant Mr. and Mrs. Querril). The more she considered John, the more she realized that he was a spirit from another world. He was not really one of the Querril set, although he fitted into it so well. Nearly all her friends were literary people, artists, craftsmen, folk whose outlook was essentially towards reform and socialism. John came from the social antipodes, the conventional official world. The navy! an almost incredible profession when you come to think of it, one that had to do fundamentally with killing people! It would be necessary to be more intimate with the mind of a man who chose killing as a profession, if one were to be united to him for life. She could not conceive Martin, or Rodney, or Peter, willingly choosing the navy or the army as a profession. It was the kind of thing we were all moving to eliminate from the world.

And yet John. . . . She could not imagine John being cruel. He was very considerate.

He loved animals. He was careful not to hurt people's feelings. . . . It seemed somehow inconsistent, and Magda decided on the next occasion when they found themselves alone to talk to him seriously about it. The next occasion happened to be the following afternoon when they started out to play golf, and went into a bunker to look for a ball, and forgot to look for it, and John was becoming rather a nuisance. Then she suddenly drew herself away, and shook her first finger at him, and said:

"Now, John dear, listen. I want to talk to you about something very important."

"Carry on, darling."

"It's about your . . . profession."

He looked surprised for the moment, and sat on his haunches, clutching his ankles. Then he said:

"Oh, I know it's a bit of a push. The pay's nothing to write home about. Of course I've got a bit of my own —"

"Oh, you dear donkey! I don't mean anything to do with that. I mean more . . . its moral side."

"Its moral side! The moral side of the navy!" exclaimed Lieutenant John Capel incredibly.

Then she seized his hand and said:

"Oh, I know it's moral enough. It's just splendid. The sea life, the discipline, the spirit of the whole thing. The sense of honor one associates with it. I love all that side of it. It must be fine or it would n't have produced *you*. No, leave me alone. The only thing that worries me is . . . well, you know, at the back of it all — killing people. I can't bear to think of that. I can't bear to think of you killing people. I can't think why you went into it. I suppose we're what are called humanitarians, cranks, or whatever it is, but I can't get away from it. I want to know why you . . . what compelled you to go into it."

#### IV

For the first time since she had met him, she saw the face of John Capel entirely grave. There was not even that ghost of a twinkle in his eyes. His jaw seemed to shut with a snap.

She thought he was angry. But after a few moment's reflection he said:

"My dear angel, this beats everything. The navy's the finest job in the world. My old dad was a commodore on the China Station for fifteen years. It's the finest job in the world."

He repeated this, as though he still could not credit that his dear angel could have a serious

argument against the existence of the "finest job in the world," but she insisted:

"Yes, but answer my question. The killing. . . ."

John Capel picked up a handful of sand and let it pour through his fingers.

"Nobody likes killing. But the problem is n't as simple as all that. This country would vanish without a navy. The history of England is the history of the navy. You read your history from the wrong end."

He suddenly pointed his arm in the direction of the Querrils' house and said:

"You know your friends would never have got the ideas they have about liberty and democracy, if it had n't been for the navy. And they'd never be able to hold them, and to air them — they're free to say any damn thing they like! — if it were n't for the steel ships mucking about in those dirty seas."

"Yes, that may be true. But suppose our government went to war with another civilized government for political or capitalist reasons. In your heart of hearts you might disapprove of the war. How would you feel killing other boys, perhaps as sincere as yourself?"

He smiled at her puzzled face and answered:

"This is treason, goddess of the sand dunes;

we don't have political views in the navy. Looking at it broadly, we fight for what we represent. We're only a tool of a people. And the business of a people is to stamp its type on the world. It's evolution."

John Capel had no great gift for words, and he could n't express himself eloquently. And Magda was still not convinced. She nibbled some beads on a long necklace that hung nearly to her waist. At last she said, rather dubiously:

"I was wondering whether you could n't get transferred to the merchant service!"

And then the young man behaved most surprisingly. He started almost angrily. The firm lines of his chin and mouth tautened. His clear eyes expressed a sense of outrage. He stared at her, and muttered incredibly:

"The *merchant* service! The *merchant* service!"

And Magda became aware, by a flash of revelation at that instant, that if he had had to weigh his love for her against the calls of his profession, it was she who would have had to be sacrificed, although the sacrifice would break his heart. And he looked so young, so boyish, so outraged, and yet so wistful, so horribly wanting her — and she with the power to hurt him so! She felt as though she were seeking to betray him, to



offer him a bribe for his honor. If we were to "stamp our type on the world," surely the type of John Capel should be worthy to survive. And she felt very proud that he was like that, and that it was she who had the power to make him finer still. The sun poured down on them, and she noticed the tiny fair hairs on his cheek just above the line where he had shaved. And then he turned and looked at her again. And she sighed and murmured:

"All right, you dear pirate, I suppose even if you nail a skull and cross-bones to the mast I shall have to follow you through the seven seas."

And in the subsequent proceedings which confirmed this acquiescence the intensive courtship made considerable progress.

#### IV

Indeed, it made such progress as to reach its appointed end on the very night of Mr. and Mrs. Querril's wedding-anniversary, and its announcement came rather in the nature of a bomb-shell. The Volga boat song was finished. The party broke up and scattered downstairs, the majority going to the dining-room to drink cocoa and eat biscuits. Aunt Lena had already gone to bed, and Mr. Querril had gone into the smoking-room



to have a last pipe, and read an article in "The Fortnightly" on "British Policy in the Far East," when Magda and John came in quietly from the garden, and John went straight in to Mr. Querril's room and shut the door. Mr. Querril looked up and said:

"Hullo, John! Have some of my John Cotton? It's in rather good condition."

And John replied:

"Mr. Querril, I'm sorry to bother you at this late hour, but my leave is up to-morrow. I want to ask your consent. I've proposed to Magda, and she has accepted me."

And Mr. Querril stared at him, as though expecting to hear the announcement followed by a peal of laughter, or a clap of thunder. As neither of these phenomena became apparent, he blushed, gasped, and then exclaimed:

"You don't mean it!"

But there appeared to be nothing of an equivocating nature about John Capel's face, although he was smiling confidently, so Mr. Querril jumped up and pressed his forearm, and jerked out:

"My dear good fellow!"

And then he rushed to the door, and called out, "Mother! Mother!" He seemed frightfully anxious to escape to the protection of his wife.

She came instantly, and then they both observed Magda standing in the hall, looking flushed and excited, with one long strand of hair on the left side running astray in a compromising manner.

"What is it?" exclaimed Mrs. Querril, whose thoughts were frequently occupied with street accidents happening to the darling children.

"It seems — er — John here — proposed to Magda — er — proposal for marriage and so on," stammered Mr. Querril, who always detested "a situation."

Fortunately Mrs. Querril's technique for such an emergency was more advanced. She held out her arms to Magda, and Magda rushed into them, and they both kissed, and cried, and murmured, "Darling," in unison. This lasted several minutes, and then Mrs. Querril dabbed her eyes and embraced John. He felt her damp cheek pressed against his, and he thought to himself:

"Evidently it's going to be all right."

Rumor has the reputation of a coquette, being volatile, irresponsible, and having the faculty of always "getting there" unaccountably. On this occasion it slithered quite easily across the hall, and up and down the staircase. There was no general rush or convocation. It happened easily

and humidly. Evelyn was the first to appear, and she too cried, and kissed them both.

Annette and Joan came in together, and also kissed John, and he did not mind. And Mrs. Lemaire hugged him and looking into his eyes exclaimed:

"Aw-h! My beautiful faithless Jack-ee, and eet vas only las' night you said you lofed *me!*"

"I'll always be able to sandwich that in, Aunt," replied the sailor, who was too excited to be gallant.

And then the boys straggled in one by one, and shook hands rather self-consciously, and muttered congratulations. Tony MacDowell seemed a little indifferent. (As a matter of fact, Tony, who had only been there once or twice, was already making his own preparations to fall in love with Magda.) And he found himself taken upstairs to see Aunt Lena. She came out of her room, in a uniform that was either a mackintosh or a dressing-gown, and said:

"I understand I'm to congratulate you, Mr. Capel. Has Mr. Querril given his consent?"

And John replied quite truthfully:

"As far as I can make out, Madame."

Nevertheless he was very conscious of not having done the engagement business in quite

the right way. It was a *faux pas*. He ought to have prepared the ground more. He had perverted a sacred rite which ought decently to have gone on for two or three years, into a very crude theatrical performance. An intensive courtship was rather an indelicate affair. Moreover, it was unfortunate to have announced it on the very night of the wedding anniversary. The news would be disturbing to "the darlings," and might tend to make them feel they were getting older. An engaged daughter! It would keep them awake at night.

## VI

And indeed Mr. Querril did lie awake some time. He peeped across at his wife once or twice (they occupied separate beds), and he thought to himself:

"Poor Jenny! This will mean a lot of worry to her. I do hope she will sleep. So sudden, so very, very sudden. A dear good fellow, John! but . . . precipitate. We hardly know him. It must have been developing under our very noses, and we had n't suspected. Of course one's children grow up, but . . . it's a great trial for the mother. Dear me, I don't believe any one let Potash out. . . ."

And on her side Mrs. Querril was thinking:

"My poor George! How this will upset him! He adores my darling Magda. What a very peculiar way of announcing an engagement! So unprepared we were. Of course he's a gentleman through and through, any one can see that. His people too, we know; they're nice kind people. I believe there's a bishop in the family somewhere, but oh, dear! George will never think any one is good enough for our Magda! He'll never say so, though. Of course it's natural; we all get older and older. The children develop, but it's hard on the father to lose them like that. What a lot there will be to think about! There will be frocks to make, and other things. . . ."

She peered above the sheets, and said quietly:

"Where are you going, George?"

"I don't think any one let Potash out, darling."

Mrs. Querril sighed.

"I should n't bother, darling; he's been running about the garden all the evening."

Magda was not sure whether she slept or not, or whether the dreams which came to her were real or not, but she was floating away over sunlit waters with a pirate crew. They were desperate fellows with bandaged heads, and ear-rings,

and grinning teeth, and they sang wild songs and told her about an island they were taking her to. She was rather frightened of them — they gesticulated and they were armed with knives and pistols! — but her dream of the island was such a beautiful dream that the journey seemed — worth while.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE INTENSIVE COURTSHIP

#### I

**I**T was during this month of July that a distinct psychological development took place in Peter. That period about the twenties is always one in which the heart is apt to outrun the brain. It is an age to be an evangelist, a remaker of the world, or a sensualist. Tremendous impulses come pushing up from underneath, and there is sometimes not sufficient mentality to adjust them. One is attacked by an idea, one half-understands it, or reads a smattering of some one else's opinion upon it, and at once becomes a whole-hog champion. It is regrettable that when we have attained a greater power of adjustment we lose that enthusiasm.

The movement attacked Peter in a surprising form — he began by becoming a critic of his own family! Of the development of that amazing impulse we shall read later on, but its inception was undoubtedly due to his association with two people, Emma Troon and Tony MacDowell.

With Tony MacDowell it was a spiritual association. Peter was a philosopher, but Tony was a super-philosopher, a seer, a prophet, a wise-man-from-the-West; a combination of the "teachings of Confucius" and some technical trade catalogue. He knew everything, from the profit Mr. Gillette made on each of his safety razor-blades to the emotions of a woman in childbirth. Moreover, he had a quiet, unobtrusive way of asserting himself. His generalizations were like his face, flat and broad. His expressions were pungent and forceful. He and Peter went out to lunch nearly every day from the Slade, and sometimes they wandered the streets together, and dined in little Soho restaurants. And what Peter and Tony did not know about life was not worth recording. The theories they evolved together about men and women, about sociology and art, and liberty and love, and other trivial matters, were always startling and left no loopholes for further argument. And Peter found that he became much more intimate with Tony than he was with either Martin or Rodney. He was less self-conscious in discussing certain matters with him than with his brothers.

And one day in a tea-shop in the Strand Tony said: "You know, Pete, your people are too sweet. I don't mean in the jollying sense, I

mean that they really *are* too sweet. Family life is the finest thing in the world — it's certainly the happiest — but it can be overdone. Biologically it's bad when it harries the individual power of expression. Each one of your bunch ought to be taken and dumped down separately into one of those New Mexican towns where you live right down on the raw all the time. If you're a gentleman you come through; if you're not a gentleman you go under. Your lot would come through because they're gentlemen — I don't mean the girls — I'm just talking of a type. What it does n't allow for — this attitude I mean, this Querril outlook — is that in all the big things in life one has to act *alone*. In every adventure, in every experience, there comes a moment when one has suddenly to weigh a chance, make a quick decision — and one has to do that — alone. And in the end one has to stand before the bar of God — alone. I don't really mean a bar, and I don't quite know what I mean by God, but there must come a moment when one is all collected together, all one's life and impulses and temptations — one's whole story, in fact — and then all these others only exist in the way that they affected us or we affected them. One must be terribly alone then. And this mutual self-effacing business is bad

for a race. Unselfishness becomes selflessness. Don't imagine you only find Querrils dotted about in these lime-washed villas in Surrey. They're a by-product of an age which has been so long lulled by refinement and security that it has forgotten how it arrived. There are crowds of Querrils hunched around Boston and even way out at Los Angeles. But it's essentially an Anglo-Saxon production. You don't find it on the Continent of Europe so much, because there the people — owing to their geographical position — always have the fear of God on them."

## II

These words gave Peter food for reflection. At the same time his mind was much occupied with Emma. He saw her two or three times a week at "The Pig-sty," and she was becoming more and more of an obsession. Before he awakened in the morning his senses would become colored by some pleasurable excitement, and then when he was fully conscious he realized what it was. He thought of Emma and made love to her in his dreams. When he came into actual contact with her, his efforts were not so successful. He shook with a very palsy of self-consciousness. He looked at her timidly and

stabbed the air with brief commonplaces and halting questions. The position was all the more galling because Emma herself seemed to be losing some of her shyness. She was more talkative than he. She always seemed to be watching for him, and when he arrived and shut himself in the sitting-room, she would come and tap on the door and ask him some question. Then she would stand there by the door and look at him with a pensive agitation in her eyes, and quite cleverly make further need for questions and replies. At this time, too, she appeared to be better dressed, and in better health. She always wore a clean print apron, and she had neat shoes which displayed a very pretty ankle. Her father, it appeared, was much better. He had been quite kind to her, and had given her the shoes and also the new skirt and blouse.

Peter always kicked himself that he cut so poor a figure at these interviews. And yet, what was he to do? It would be quite easy to make love to her, quite easy and quite — caddish!

For it must never be forgotten that Peter was nothing if not a philosopher. This was his first serious excursion into the realms of Eros. He knew nothing about these things. His father had told him nothing, and he never discussed



them with his brothers. The boys had never even been allowed to risk the perils of a public school. So that all Peter knew, he knew from intuition, from books, and from his own observation of men and women. His intuition told him that he was very much in love with Emma, his book-reading told him that there were at least two kinds of love, and his observation of men and women perceived — rather annoyingly — that this was probably “the other kind” of love, and his masterly philosophy kept on insisting that in any case it would n’t do. The philosophy was indeed relentless on the point. At all kinds of odd moments it would jog him with:

“Don’t be a fool, Peter. You know perfectly well it won’t do.”

Magda’s engagement to young Capel vivified these conclusions. He could not help comparing Emma with Magda, and it was rather hard on Emma. Emma in the Querril household would be an inconceivable anomaly. It would break “the darlings’” hearts. No, he would never be able to marry Emma, consequently to make love to her would be caddish. It must be acknowledged that Peter at twenty was a better philosopher than might be expected.

Nevertheless the *impasse* embittered him. He was unreasonably annoyed with his family that



they thus held silent watch at the outer barrier of his desires, and Tony's words about "the Querril outlook" helped to sharpen his critical faculty. Was it possible that the Querril family were not perfect after all? Peter became more moody, and more observant.

### III

One day Peter mounted a bus on the way to Westminster. Opposite to him sat a fair girl with short curly hair and gray eyes. She was young and pretty. She might have been a dancer. For some reason or other Peter could not take his eyes from her, and he was aware that she was looking at him with little furtive peeps. It was a long journey, and as it proceeded he observed that her eyes became merrier and more inviting. She smiled and then looked away, and the intervals when she turned away became gradually of shorter and shorter duration. A few turnings before his she got up and stood on the backboard of the bus, and hovered there like a small bird about to take flight but still avid for the crumbs that yet may fall. When she got off she stood on the pavement, and peeped back into the bus, smiled quite candidly, and gave a little movement of her head that if not an invita-

tion was nothing at all. Peter felt his heart beating rapidly, but he sat still. After the bus had left this dainty morsel out of sight, he wondered whether he had not been a fool. The girl haunted him for the rest of the day, and the air retained a tingling memory of her.

He never saw this fair girl with the gray eyes again, but she supplied another faggot for the philosopher to burn beneath the caldron of his experience. During the brief incident, the grip which Emma held upon his emotions was entirely relaxed. Emma indeed ceased to exist. It is true that the visions of Emma started again when the recollections of the other girl had dimmed.

"But," he thought, "is it possible to fall in love with some one you have never spoken to?"

"The whole thing is just a calf business," he decided. In truth, had he ever spoken to Emma? Was there any real difference in the two cases?

When he had persuaded himself in the best Socratic manner that there was not, he was relieved and wretched at the same time. He avoided Westminster, and painted low-toned landscapes with furious abandon. Over the week-ends the tennis parties went on as usual, and the Querrils entertained their friends, and lay in hammocks, and went for strolls on the heath, invented new games, and studied each

other with adoring solicitude. And at night under the shade of the orange lamp, they would lie huddled in little groups, worshipping their gods, and sublimely ignorant of the bolts of Jove—as impersonated by Mr. Jim Troon. The summer holidays were being discussed, a most absorbing topic. . . .

## IV

It was eventually decided to go to Sheringham, and for a very characteristic reason. It happened that one evening George was undergoing a dose of Mr. Stride. He was in one of his most trying moods. It appeared that he had to meet his sister later on at some town on the east coast, and he was complaining bitterly. He detested the east coast and had n't a word to say in its favor. So Mr. Querril, in order to hearten his guest, spoke enthusiastically about the delights of Cromer and Sheringham, places which he really disliked. No one had been listening to Mr. Stride, but Evelyn happened to hear George's panegyric. She immediately conceived the idea that her father wanted to go to Sheringham, and she reported the matter to Magda. And Magda told Martin, and Martin told Rodney, and an inner ring was formed to work out the conspiracy. None of the children liked the east

coast, but at dinner the conversation was worked round to the question, and the boys talked as though they were tired of their traditional Babington in Devonshire and wanted a change, and Evelyn said she had heard that Sheringham was "simply ripping."

Mr. Querril, overhearing the conversation, said to his wife afterwards:

"I believe the children want to go to the east coast, my dear."

And Mrs. Querril, who was in the know, but who was advised not to express an opinion because it might be suspected (she never had any personal predilections about anything), said:

"Yes, it would be a nice change, dear. What do you think?"

And so it came about that the whole family went away to a place that not one of them wanted to visit. However, the holiday was eventually postponed till September, owing to the volcanic action of Magda's fiancé, who suddenly wrote that he had "wangled another bit of leave" for the third week in August, and urged for the wedding to take place then. Mr. Querril did indeed make some mild protest about the inadvisability of marrying in haste, but the lieutenant was inexorably plausible in his demands. There was no real reason against it. In fact there were

very strong reasons in favor of it. Among others it appeared that an uncle, who had made a will in John's favor, was anxious to make over a considerable sum of money to him on his marriage. He was a very old gentleman with a kind heart and noble disposition, who enjoyed seeing young people about him (and incidentally the arrangement dodged the iniquitous death-duties recently introduced by a scoundrelly Radical Government).

## V

The wedding took place in the local church, a building never previously entered by any member of the family. It took place in the church because the family believed that Mrs. Querril believed that it was unlucky not to be married in a church, and also because Aunt Lena would be shocked, and certain dear friends might think a registrar's office "funny."

Magda wore a dark-blue traveling frock, and the other members of the family wore their usual clothes. There was indeed a desperate effort on that day to appear "usual." John; of course, was in naval uniform, and he brought with him a certain Captain Lambleton, a breezy giant and a gunnery expert, as best man. The two naval officers appeared to the Querrils almost to strike



a note of discord. They seemed to judge a wedding as a festival of joy and fun. Even John, on this most sacred and moving occasion, appeared to be light-hearted and gay. And the captain was a most irrepressible person, and he evidently meant to see it through in the real wedding spirit. Although he had never met any of them before, he kissed Magda, and Evelyn, and Mrs. Querril in the vestry, and even Annette, whom he pretended to think another sister. He concealed his surprise at finding no champagne at luncheon, but it did not affect his high spirits, and he laughed like a tempest, and made love industriously to all the ladies, scoring most successfully perhaps with Mrs. Lemaire.

It should be mentioned that this lack of champagne was not meanness on the part of Mr. Querril, nor was it done on principle. It was merely all part of the day's campaign of "usualness." A little whisky was always kept in the house for visitors, and there was generally a rather vinegary claret, which nobody drank, and even a little port. But this was to be essentially a normal occasion, and on normal occasions they never had anything to drink except water for lunch and coffee afterwards.

And so at the luncheon — or the breakfast, as it is called by people who have champagne —



they sat round the table and were unusually usual, talking volubly and striving to enter into the playful badinage of John and the captain, but all the time being tremulously observant of Magda and of each other. Magda herself was perhaps the most successful. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes were bright, but they would occasionally wander to her mother's dear face, and to little Evelyn, whom she was leaving for the first time, and to "darling George," and to all the boys, each with some little personal niche and intimacy for her. How sad it is that in all these great experiences we can't take all those we love with us! At least that was one of her momentary reflections. (Whether it would have been endorsed by John is open to conjecture.)

And Mrs. Querril, the cynosure of sympathetic glances, was thinking:

"Dear, dear, so little Magda's going! That's the first! I'm sure he'll be kind to her. That blue frock suits her, but how badly Miss Peewit has cut the yoke. . . ."

And Evelyn thought:

"Darling mother, what a wrench it will be for her! How strange it seems; Magda to-day is just Magda, to-morrow she will be some one quite different. She is going away to live with a man — a man we hardly know. She'll be his com-

panion, his best friend, his . . . bedfellow (how awful that seems!). I hope the darlings won't worry too much. How noisy the captain is! almost ribald. . . ."

At length the married couple took their departure. They drove to the station in a one-horse fly. (Chessilton Heath boasted of only three, as the majority of people had their own cars.) It was an affecting farewell, and Mrs. Querril was allowed to cry a little, and the captain kissed every one again, and Magda was very brave, and the dogs barked, and the vehicle ambled out of sight for all the world as though conveying the products of intensive courtships and rushed weddings were as usual as conveying old Mr. Dither from the station to the golf clubhouse, where he could disburse the mellow chestnuts garnered during a hard day's loafing in the political clubs.

## VI


And when they had gone, the Querril family strolled about the drawing-room and the garden and behaved more usually than ever. So keyed up and solicitous of each other were they that they could do naught else. Evelyn and the Lemaire girls talked to Mrs. Querril nearly all the afternoon about the cut of Magda's yoke, and

dressmakers and dressmaking. And Mr. Querril talked to Mr. Lemaire — who had taken the day off for the occasion — about a new book that had just come out on the life of Mr. Gladstone. And the boys played clock-golf on the corner of the lawn, and smoked innumerable pipes and cigarettes.

Decimus Postern alone seemed abnormal and unusual. He sat apart, a heaving volcano of melancholy. The master of words had nothing to say. All through the day he had been depressed and silent, and now he looked like some Gargantuan baby on the verge of tears. He gave himself away distressingly.

It is a peculiar attribute of certain florid characters that, when they are stung to experience a real emotion, they become as simple as little children. And Decimus had got it badly.

Living as he did in a world of words, among sparkling acquaintanceships, and jolly good fellows of transient affections, and elbowing his way about in a profession of papier-mâché emotions he found in the atmosphere of the Querrils a soothing benefaction, something which touched him profoundly. They were so genuinely loving. He had known them a long time, and he was very fond of them. He very seldom talked to them intimately, but he liked to sit there and listen to



their voices. They warmed him with their kindness and sincerity. And then, of course, he gradually began to realize that Magda's voice warmed him most of all. He would sit there with his eyes half closed and listen to Magda calling across the garden, talking to the dogs, or mothering her mother. Her voice was musical, caressing, finely attuned to every shade of expression. And then more slowly he realized that her face was just the same, and that indeed everything about Magda was fine-drawn, wonderfully poised . . . adorable.

He wondered at times whether he had been deceived; whether this mystic sense of enjoying an enveloping atmosphere was simply due to the fact that he loved Magda. The Querrils were just an atmosphere surrounding Magda. He had liked them all this time because they encompassed that central figure with its definite individual grip on himself. But, however it may have been, Decimus had nursed his hopeless infatuation through several long years. And it was one of the few things about which he had no illusions. He was eighteen years older than Magda, a porpoise in love with a flower. His fame and the glamour of his personality had never by the slightest flutter affected her attitude toward him. It was always "dear old Decimus." And

dear old Decimus had visualized this day, and dreaded it, and — words seemed dead things in the Querrils' garden. In his silent reverie he was later on assisted by a fellow sufferer. Tony MacDowell strolled up and took a deck chair by his side, and remained comfortably mute. The family and the Lemaires went out for a walk, and still this oddly assorted pair sat side by side in silence. At length Tony said:

"Say, Dess, I would n't like to attend a funeral in this house." Receiving no reply, he added, "I see it's got you fair beat — like me."

This candid confession seemed to demand no corroboration, and the large man remained puffily silent.

At length Tony continued:

"Anyway, it will be a bully thing for the Querrils — this wedding. It's just what was wanted. That young man is the real goods."

Another interval and then:

"They interest me enormously, these Querrils. They're one of God's luxuries, and I'm not convinced yet that He can afford it. If the world were all Querrils, well and good. But . . . there's something about it almost sociologically perverted, like an attempt to divert the natural channels of human expression. It's a force which ignores the element of conflict in social



evolution. They're amateurs at life. It's dangerous."

Decimus blinked at the white gables of the house, and Tony continued:

"They eat each other up. It's the herd-instinct carried to a phenomenal degree. It frightens me. You never know what's coming out of it. By God! those photographs! It's like Pandora's box from which all the evils of the world may flow."

The large man stirred, and turned his humid eyes to his companion, and spoke at last:

"It's quite true, Tony; all the evils of the world may flow from it. But you must complete your analogy. The world may yet be saved by amateurs. There was something else at the bottom of Pandora's box."

"I'm a bit rusty on my myths. What was it?"

"Hope!"

## VII

In the meantime the family and the Lemaires were strolling on the heath, keeping close together, but changing company continuously as though they were afraid of becoming too intimate with each other's thoughts. They flicked the surface of every discussion and talked at length



about the captain. That gentleman would have been pleased and flattered if he had known what an asset he was to the family for the rest of the day. Having once opened the subject, they talked about him interminably. They felt freer and more natural. He was like a vast, impersonal force that did not affect the fundamentals. He was so outside them that he did not matter. They did not appreciate him till hours after he had gone, but when they did he was a veritable godsend.

In awkward pauses they would rail Mrs. Lemaire about flirting with him, and she would exclaim:

“Oh! But he was a pair-feet dar-leeng!”

And then they could laugh quite comfortably.

The Lemaire's stayed to dinner, and that assertive gap in the table, the seat that darling Magda always occupied, was unobtrusively filled by Mr. Lemaire. They did not like to play games afterwards. Magda always presided at games and she was so good at them. Neither would music do. Music, that terrible wizard who pulled the strings of the heart. And so they sat about and talked, and Tony gave a description of duck-hunting on Lake Michigan in the early morning, and the wonderful breakfasts you could eat afterwards of “hen-fruit,” fried potatoes, and

flannel cakes. Decimus had disappeared, and Tony explained that he had taken him home and put him to bed.

There was a distressing little incident later on. Among the minor fads of the family, Magda, Evelyn, and Peter always had cocoa last thing at night, and Magda invariably had biscuits with anchovy paste. A maid automatically brought these delicacies into the drawing-room at half-past ten. And on this occasion she thoughtlessly brought everything in as usual. With great presence of mind Martin slipped the third cup behind a photograph frame before Mrs. Querril had observed it, but the anchovy biscuits lay incriminately for every one to observe. Darling Magda! Where was she now?

Everything seemed to imply that Magda had gone forever. But a naval officer labors under a great marital disadvantage. He cannot take his wife to sea with him, and the only time they can have together is his leave. It was arranged that they should go to Lynmouth and then prospect for a flat at Chelsea for future eventualities. At the end of his leave Magda would return to Chessilton Heath indefinitely.

As a matter of fact she had gone away for only ten days.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SACRÉ DU PRINTEMPS

#### I

**I**T is strange how sometimes a trivial thing, like a conversation between Mr. Querril and Mr. Stride about the salubrious benefits of the east coast, may be the indirect means of affecting not only the immediate happiness but the future welfare and fate of a whole group of people.

It is probable that if the family had followed their traditional policy and gone to the placid village of Babington, the normal tenor of their lives would have followed its accustomed course indefinitely.

But it happened that the month of September was a particularly robustious one at Sheringham. For the first two weeks they were hardly ever free from a strong wind from the northeast, which was very invigorating but which got on the nerves after a time. And during the third week it rained heavily. Mr. Querril, Martin, and Evelyn all developed colds and had to stay

in bed for some days. The furnished house they had taken proved not to be weatherproof, and the wind rattled the windows and doors. Moreover, they had come quite unprepared for this kind of experience. They had not enough warm things, and Mr. Querril's mackintosh cape and heavy boots were at the flat in Westminster. It was eventually decided that one of the boys should go up to town to collect these things, and also to attend to one or two matters of business for Mr. Querril. At first Rodney was going and then on the morning *he* developed a chill, and so the lot fell to Peter.

It was an arrangement which Peter accepted with alacrity. He was indeed becoming rapidly bored with Sheringham. He felt extremely well and virile, but cramped and restless. He could not paint, and the golfiness and villaishness of the place annoyed him. They had no other friends there—the Lemaires had gone to Etaples, and Tony was in Holland painting black-and-white cattle and canals and wind-mills in the Maris manner.

One day he went for a walk by himself, and the horrid realization came to him that his own family were getting on his nerves! It was a treasonable reflection, but a true one. They were thrown so much together here, and there

was nothing to do, and interminable games indoors began to pall, and Peter found himself listening and more and more frequently criticizing. "Darling George" was very limited in some ways. He wished Magda — who had rejoined them after her honeymoon — and Evelyn wouldn't *schwären* so. Martin and Rodney were both tryingly self-satisfied at moments. He yearned for Tony, or for some influence to counteract this assured goodness and sweetness. Of course they *were* good and sweet and quite sincere. It was n't a pose. It was quite natural to them.

Peter went for long tramps by himself, and tried to work off his own perverse mood, and so he did. But on his return, back it would come again. And he became as disgusted with himself as he was with them. And he could n't explain it. It was as though some monk in a cloistered sanctuary away up in the hills, who had listened to the *campanella* every day of his life, suddenly *heard* it for the first time. And its beat no longer conveyed to him the expression of the calm beauty of the evening, but whispered to him of a world down in the valley, a place so disturbing that it prompted him to doubt his fate.

## II

And one day he had stood on a promontory overlooking the sea. The wind was blowing half a gale, and the angry sea appeared to be attacking the land, lashing its way between the clefts of rock. The sky above was a scurrying movement of grayness and menace, and the gulls went screaming against the wind, as though this frenzied conflict stimulated them. And Peter stood there, holding on to a rock, and thought:

“It’s all very big.”

And the very bigness seemed to him inspiring. He must have appeared a very small person perched up there on the rock, wrapped up in his mackintosh and cap, with his tuft of brown hair blowing free. And he too, like the gulls, felt the thrill of conflict. It was tremendous! The breezes were charged with the stuff that makes sagas, and legends, and operas, and the great moving dramas that have rocked the living world. It made him realize the origin of myths. Life was conflict. It was n’t all goodness and sweetness, nor even philosophy. It was something bigger. It even had the faculty at times of making these things seem trivial and small. There was a genius of life itself, somewhere beyond good and evil. . . .



## III

On the day when he went up to London he arrived early in the afternoon. He went straight to Mr. Querril's office, and transacted the few small business matters (and heard incidentally that young Stallard had run away from the pig-farm and there was no trace of him). At four o'clock he was free for the day, and London lay temptingly before him. The pavements were wet, but the sun shone fitfully between light clouds. He felt interested and curiously satisfied. The streets were throbbing with life. He determined to have an evening of selfish introspective delights. He would mingle in this living mass, and enjoy his own detached visions. He would do anything that came into his head. He would be a pilgrim in search of salvation. He would forget all about his family and the troubles of a philosopher who had got to the end of his tether. He would drift and enjoy.

He dined early, in Soho, at a restaurant that Tony and he had often favored. There he ran into a young engaged couple from Chessilton Heath. They invited him to sit at their table, and he could hardly refuse, although he knew he would not be wanted. They emphasized his lonely mood by talking to him politely and ab-

sently, but their eyes devouring each other's all the time. They had tickets for a theater, and he watched them go, a little enviously. They were so oblivious to the world, so centered on each other. *That* must be a wonderful experience.

How should he amuse himself till bedtime? He sat smoking and thinking, and then his eye lighted on a handbill advertising the Russian ballet at Covent Garden.

He had never seen the Russian ballet, but he had heard Magda and Rodney and some of the others say it was "simply too lovely for words." He was not in the mood to accept their verdict unquestioningly. On the contrary, he felt a pugnacious disposition to criticize, to assert himself. But the idea of a ballet appeared to him at the moment as intriguing as any other form of diversion. He went out into the streets. London seemed very full for the time of year. People had probably been driven back by the bad weather. It was always rather exciting, this friction of passing humanity. At the corner of Leicester Square two men in evening dress were passing him when one suddenly called out:

"Hullo, Querril!"

He turned and discovered a young man who lived at Chessilton Heath. His name was Car-

ling and he was the son of a wealthy oil magnate. He seemed to be in a riotously merry mood. He clapped Peter on the back, and introduced him to his friend "Major Yates." Then he put his arm through Peter's and exclaimed:

"We were just going into the Leicester lounge."

Peter had a sudden stab of misgiving.

"This is a bit thick," he thought. He had never been into such a place in his life, and the rapid vision of the horrified faces of his family flashed before him. And then he thought:

"After all, what does it matter? There's no harm in seeing what these people do."

He found himself in a gorgeously upholstered room upstairs, and drinking some pernicious green liquid out of a small glass. The room was crowded with men and women, and the women predominated. They sat at little round tables, staring vacuously hither and thither. Their eyes had the hard, pleading expression of the victim that has lost everything except the gambler's hope, and a self-deceptive faith that the game itself is worth playing for the sake of the seven pieces of silver.

Peter felt hot and ashamed. A pale girl, younger than some of the others, sitting at a table near by, roused his pity. The major spoke

to her, and she smiled mechanically, and Peter wished he had not seen the turgid misery welling up in her eyes. While his friends were thus occupied, he slipped out.

## IV

He was late at Drury Lane, and one ballet was already over, and they were half through "Prince Igor." He had not time to grasp any idea of story. He was suddenly plunged into a world of barbaric vibration. Savage warriors, and women, and princes, in a rhythm that was new to him, whirled across the stage in what appeared at first an uncontrolled riot. It was not till he had watched it for some moments that he realized that it was one of the most cunningly conceived, well-ordered riots the mind of man had ever invented. He had never heard such music, never seen such color, such daring schemes adroitly interdependent. It was as though passion herself were expressing the gay plumage of the senses in terms of the theater. And Peter thought to himself:

"But this is an entirely new art—a new human experience."

He was still trembling with the emotion it had produced in him, when the curtain went up on "Les Sulphides."

He was immediately translated to the gentler nuance of cultivation. The moonlit garden in a Watteau monochrome. Music which he knew and loved. Shepherds, and lovers, fauns and satyrs, and little amourettes among the trees. An almost passionless grace. Men and women and statues equally adorable, equally artificial, and touching the surface of life like butterflies who ought to be in bed. And yet how dear it was! how satisfying! And if the age was artificial, the music of Chopin could strike a deeper note. And in the dim garden the faces of women were beautiful, and hearts were beating beneath those artificial clothes and cultivated manners, and art could be very vital, perhaps more vital because it had here the very media of the theater, the paint and powder of lyrical expression.

When it was over, Peter sank back, tingling with a sense of satisfaction and happiness, but his appetite whetted for fresh experiences. The last item was called on the program "Le Sacre du Printemps," and the contrast was cleverly conceived. There was a sudden blare of discord which raged continuously till the curtain went up. He then beheld an archaic scene. In a primitive landscape which might have been painted by a child of six, a woman was tied to a stake. Men in red cloaks were stamping up and



down in little groups. This monotonous beat went on and on, and Peter wondered when it was going to stop. It was horrible, insistent, impressive. The lighting was crude and toneless, there were no half tones, no contrasts, no lights and shadows — just the victim and a crowd of savage, bearded men. They swayed backwards and forwards, broke up into various groups, and then rejoined. Others came in, priests and acolytes, all dressed in primary colors. The dance raged, but the monotonous rhythm never varied. It seemed to express perpetuity, the primordial lust of man, coming through the ages, demanding his victim. Women came on in black, to weep over their sister, but the woman at the stake never moved all through the act. Beads of perspiration stood on Peter's brow. He felt that he could not stand it. And suddenly he seemed to see her as though she and the other woman he had just seen at the café were one and the same person. She had the same listless apathy, the same pale, haunted face. Beat, beat, beat, went the feet of the worshipers whose god demanded this unholy sacrifice. They seemed to be getting hungrier, more avid for the grim business. More and more men appeared, growling and moving in and out. Sometimes the music would sway as though about to break



into some more melodic phrase, but always it came back to the rhythm of an inexorable purpose. And the woman gave no sign. Suddenly as though the god were tired of this drawn-out jest, he struck the hour of doom, and the men drew away in a great circle, and then with a feral cry they rushed to the center, and threw the victim on a shield and held her towards the sun. The sacrifice of spring!

## V

When Peter arrived at the flat that evening he felt that something fundamental had happened to him. He had gained something and lost something, but he had gained more than he had lost. Nothing would ever be quite the same again. He was more of a person. He lighted a cigarette and drank some lithia water. He swelled with a kind of assertive pride. A hundred little visions and impulses crowded his mind, things he meant to do, pictures he meant to paint, attitudes he intended to take up with regard to certain big issues, particularly as far as they concerned his family. He formed a resolution that in future he would always say exactly what he thought at home, even if it hurt their feelings. Anything else was a mistake. The home life of

the Querrils was a small, circumscribed affair. It wanted expanding.

About some of his impulses he was vague, but one stood out conspicuously. It was a desire to champion woman, to be chivalrous. The lot of woman was pitiable. She was handicapped by Nature, and man had laid a prehensile grip upon this disadvantage. He had her well in tow.

Peter smoked another cigarette and thought big, philosophic thoughts, and then he turned out the light and went to bed. In spite of the riotous evening, he went to sleep almost at once. He had no idea how long he had slept when he was aware of a disturbing, knocking sound. He opened his eyes and listened. Some one was tapping furiously on the outside door of the flat. He rose and walked in his pajamas to the door and opened it. In the doorway stood Emma.

Her face was pale and scared, and she carried a small parcel. She almost pushed past him, as she whispered hoarsely:

“For God’s sake let me in!”

He opened the door wider, and admitted her.

“What is it? What’s the trouble, Emma?”

She stood panting by him, with one hand on her heart. Then she started crying.

The boy rested his hand on her shoulder.

“Don’t cry. Tell me what is it, Emma.”

"He's turned me out! He's turned me out! I believe he's following me. Oh, Mr. Peter!"

"That's all right. Keep calm. I'll look after you."

Peter slipped on a heavy coat hanging on the door and ran down the stairs in his bedroom slippers, switching on the electric light as he passed. The outside door was shut, but he opened it and looked out into the street. No one was in sight. It was a warm night, and he ran out on to the pavement. His pulse was beating rapidly at the thrill of this unexpected adventure. He waited some moments, but saw nothing stirring. Then he went back and shut the door. When he had switched off the light and regained the little passage in the flat, he found Emma seated on a hall chair, her head buried in her hands.

"It's all right, Emma," he said. "How did you get in?"

"I had the key."

Of course she had the key. She had a key, so that she could get in and do her work when the Querrils were away. He turned on the light in the sitting-room.

"Come in and tell me," he said softly.

She followed him, with her head bent and her bosom heaving.

He sat in a chair away from her and waited

for her to begin. And then he found her eyes, which were not all grief, watching him above her handkerchief.

"He was all right," she said suddenly, "until last month. And then that man he had often spoken of, who he calls old Castro, he turned up. I don't know who he is. Father said once that they were shipmates. Father's been all sorts of things in his time. This man Castro is a terror. He's a foreigner of some sort, a seafaring man. Father seemed terrified when he first saw him, and then they went out together and got drunk. He's an awful man. . . ."

Emma shivered and bit her handkerchief. Peter noticed among other little things that her handkerchief was clean and her clothes tidy and in good taste. It struck him how she had improved since the day when he first saw her, standing inert in that room at Hammersmith. She seemed no longer "the extraordinarily interesting kid," but a woman, with all the ingenuousness of childhood added to the point and mystery of womanhood. The sleepy eyes were more watchful and alluring, and "the old ghost in her ancestry" had many things to say about the senses.

She found him watching her, and continued at random :

"Father took to drinking again, and one night Castro tried to kiss me, and there was a lot of trouble, and Father wanted to turn me out. 'Go and live on these swell friends of yours,' he says. You was away at the time, Mr. Peter, and, of course, in any case . . ."

Emma smiled feebly, with a supplicating look at the back of her eyes.

"Father and old Castro seemed to know everything. He came and told me to-night that you was back, and told me to come to you. When I refused, he twisted my arm and went out. He came back alone about an hour ago. He was like a madman. He drove me out, and said if I did n't come here he'd kill me. He followed me along the streets. I thought he was watching me outside. . . ."

The truth of the position began to dawn on Peter. He stood up and paced the room.

"Well, this is a rum thing, Emma," he said. "I don't know what to do. You see, I'm here alone. I — Perhaps I'd better take you to a hotel."

And then suddenly she jumped up and threw her arms round him.

"Oh, don't let me go! Don't let me go! I'm frightened. Keep me here with you, Mr. Peter."

Peter felt her warm body pressing against his,



and her arms holding him tight, and he thought of black-bearded men dancing in a forest. His voice trembled as he whispered:

"Well, perhaps it would be all right for you to sleep in one of the bedrooms. No one need know."

And then the most surprising moment in his life came to Peter. Her head was on his breast, and slowly she turned her face upwards and closed her eyes, and put out her lips for him to kiss. The kiss had happened almost before he was aware of its danger, and it lasted for a hundred years. When at last he held her from him, his face was drawn and white, and he could not get his voice. And Emma was no longer a child, but a thing of clinging essences, vibrating to the rhythm of primitive life. And she appeared freer, more unselfconscious than he. She exclaimed:

"Do you know what was happening on that night when your brother first came to the buildings?"

He managed to say "No."

"I was walking out as he came in. I was on my way. I was going on the streets."

"Emma! . . . Emma!"

"Oh, don't despise me, you kid! You know nothing. You don't know the sort of life we



have to live, you people. Only you came after that, and it all seemed different then. And I fought against this feeling because I wanted you. I want *you*, do you see? I made up my mind, if ever I was driven out, it was *you* should have me."

It was then that the chivalrous impulses of the philosopher found their master key. And he thought of the woman in the wood, the sacrifice of spring! Did ever such an opportunity occur to any knight riding through stricken lands? And he raised his hand as Sir Lancelot must have raised his visor and thought: "I will save this woman in the face of the whole world."

## VI

He held her tightly and said: "You must n't say these mad things, Emma. You're overwrought. Come and lie down. To-morrow we'll make a plan for you."

She sighed, and he led her into the unoccupied bedroom. He transferred the key to the inside so that she could lock herself in. He dare not trust himself to kiss her again, and as he went out he saw her standing ghostlike and tremulous by the end of the bed.

\* As he returned to his room, his mind was work-

ing at a furious pace. Desires and vague resolutions were tumbling over each other, and he could not focus them. "The other kind of love," which he had for Emma, was desperately assertive, but it was hallowed by these new-found impulses of knight-errantry. How splendid a thing to marry her, after all, in face of all the world! To protect her and care for her, to know that he had saved her from the stake. He could see himself, a small, heroic figure, routing these bearded men with their monotonous rhythm. And she loved him. Loved him . . . the most wonderful, moving, flattering experience of all. She was in that room now, not ten paces from him, longing for him, holding out her arms to him, her white knight! He lay there he knew not how long, rocking with his fevered irresolutions. Away in the distance he could hear the dim rumble of London's dubious midnight activities, and it sounded to him like the rise and fall of some great orchestral overture dimly prescient of the coming drama.

And then he heard a cry. He sprang out of bed and ran into the passage. It was all in darkness, but by the door was a figure all in white. He groped his way towards it and cried out:

"What is it?"

Emma was leaning against the door.

"I thought I heard something," she whispered hoarsely.

The boy approached her and put his arm round her. And for the first time in his life his hand adventured the soft curves of a woman's body beneath her corsetless night-dress. In the dim light reflected from the moon above St. Stephen's he could just see her eyes, and the dark setting of her hair hanging free round her shoulders. And his senses quickened by this unwonted exhilaration told him that she was lying, but he did not care.

"Why are you here?" he panted.

She did not answer. She seemed to be swaying, and he clutched her madly.

Oh, Peter, Peter! when the ramparts have fallen, and the castle is overrun by these bearded men with their interminable rhythm, what hope is there for the forces of chivalry?

They clung together like children afraid of the darkness, and then he whispered hoarsely:

"Come into your room, then!"

In one vivid moment, Peter thought:

"Magda has slept on this bed, and Mother, and all of them at times. . . ."

But that ironic stab of contrition came too late — only just too late.

## CHAPTER IX

### PTOLEMY THE SECOND HAS A RELAPSE

#### I

**I**T was the last day of September, and the Querrills had returned to Chessilton Heath. The month was making a loyal attempt to retrieve its depressing start. It was late afternoon, and the sun was warming the opulent foliage in the garden with that benign air of assured satisfaction which he assumes only when the stress of summer has passed. By the side of the lawn a tall mass of sunflowers nodded placidly, as though the sun had made these little counterfeits of himself as a wayward jest, a memento to tickle the imagination of these mortals when his day's work was accomplished. The bees were very busy among the hollyhocks, like late shoppers on a market day. The creeper on the south wall of the garden had changed from a pattern of crimson to gold within a week. Potash was very sorry for himself. He had developed a rash, and had been bathed in some quite unnecessary liquid which made him tingle. He lay on

the grass with his nose resting between his paws, consumed with resentment that Perlmutter was apparently not afflicted in the same way. Decimus had called in and was talking to Evelyn and a young man named Gregory Guest, on the brick walk of the pergola. Martin was cutting the lawn above the embankment, and Mr. Querril was cleaning up the soil of the rose beds. Peter and Rodney had not yet returned from town, and Magda was also up there with a girl friend, furnishing and arranging her flat at Chelsea. The Lemaires had not yet returned from the Continent.

Mrs. Querril regarded the scene from her bedroom window and sighed. She was never quite happy when the circle was not complete. A recollection came to her of when she was a little girl in her mother's home. She had thought one day how lovely it would be if she could take all her family, just all the people she loved most dearly, away to some desert island where they would be all alone. A beautiful island where it was all sunshine, and flowers and waterfalls, with all the necessary home comforts. And there would be no one else there at all, and they would go on living indefinitely, growing more and more loving to each other. And then she thought:

"How funny that would have been if we really had gone! I should never have met George. And now there are others. Quite a large party for the island. And then there will be — let me see, when will it be? About next April or May — another still, perhaps. Magda's. I wonder whether it will be a boy or a girl. . . . I wish Evelyn would n't wear those brown stockings with that biscuit-colored skirt. They make her ankles look so thick. And my Martin, he will marry soon, and then Rodney, and Evelyn, and Peter."

Mrs. Querril had a momentary vision of a Utopian world peopled by Querrils, and all these dear friends of theirs. It was a world in which photographs played a not unimportant part. And the day would come when she, alas! would pass beyond it, but it was pleasant to think of Magda or Evelyn holding up a little fat pink Querril, and pointing to an enlarged photograph on the wall, and saying:

"Look, darling, that was your dear grand-mama!"

It was a little source of disappointment to Mrs. Querril that neither of the boys fell in love with the Lemaire girls. There were times when she thought that Rodney and Annette, and then Peter and Annette, and then Rodney and Joan,



and then Martin and Joan . . . but no, it never seemed to get beyond the brother and sister stage. The only likely case was Peter and Annette. They were undoubtedly very fond of each other, these two. They rambled about together and went on picnics, and when Peter was ten he had proposed and been accepted. And once when they were children they got lost together up on Folly's Head beyond the heath. It was a warm summer night, and they never came home. Some one found them the next morning, sleeping quite peacefully in each other's arms among the bracken. And even now Peter and Annette meant a lot to each other. But it was so difficult to tell. Young people nowadays were so different from what they were when Mrs. Querril was a girl. They said such surprising things to each other, and even kissed, but it very often meant nothing. They would lie about all mixed up. There was something about it very charming. So trustful and beautiful. In fact, it was only possible among really pure and beautiful natures.

## II

Mrs. Querril's reveries were disturbed by a sudden commotion in the garden. Evelyn was screaming, and Martin was running after her.

Ptolemy the Second had caught a bird! Ptolemy the Second, who in all his career had never been known to hunt either birds or mice, to work, love or hate, was suddenly transformed into a fiend incarnate. He had run across the grass, flat-footed, with his tail whipping the ground, and a thrush between his cruel teeth. He was hiding now among the cabbages. The relief expedition was in hot pursuit. Evelyn, quite pale, was screaming:

"Put it down! Ptolemy! Put it down!"

And Martin, following, tense and determined, with Mr. Querril bringing up the rear with a hoe and crying out:

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! This won't do!"

Decimus and Mr. Guest remained on the brick path. They were discussing the best hotel in Bayreuth, and Guest glanced at the vegetable garden, and said casually:

"The cat's caught a bird. Well, we stayed at the Kaiserhof the summer before last and . . ."

But the awful tragedy was proceeding. Martin dashed among the cabbages, but Ptolemy shot like a black streak from one to another, and disappeared. Then Evelyn saw him under some huge rhubarb leaves. His eyes flashed bright green and he was growling. He looked horrible. Evelyn would never have believed that dear

Ptolemy could look like that. That passion could be so disfiguring. He was a different creature. She felt frightened. Martin again attacked, but Ptolemy was much too quick for him. Then Mr. Querril tried coaxing methods, which were quite unsuccessful. The dogs joined in the din. They barked, but having taken one look at Ptolemy they raced back to the lawn and continued barking there. And Ptolemy was becoming angry. He was like a wild thing. He resented all this ridiculous interference. He wanted to enjoy himself, to be cruel at leisure. . . . The hunt was quite abortive. Ptolemy was last seen under the rhododendron bushes in the Lemaires' garden, and then he vanished entirely.

Martin took Evelyn's arm. She was shaking, and the tears were glistening in her eyes.

"The bird must be quite dead," Martin said consolingly, and Mr. Querril echoed:

"Oh, yes, the bird must have been quite dead . . . a long time."

The disconsolate party trailed back to the house.

"But I can't make it out," Evelyn suddenly burst out. "It's so horrible. Ptolemy has never done this before. Why, oh, why should he suddenly. . . . He looked so horrid."

They were within earshot of the two gentlemen discussing hotels under the pergola, and Guest turned and smiled.

"My dear girl," he said. "Cats will be cats. It's natural. . . ."

He was never invited to the Querrils' again.

### III

The incident of Ptolemy cast a gloom over the rest of the evening, and apparently Rodney and Peter had missed their train. They usually caught the 5.27, which got them down at half-past six in comfortable time for dinner. It meant now that they would n't be down till 8.15, and they had not telephoned. Members of the family usually telephoned their movements from town if they were not catching usual trains. There was always a slightly strained feeling when any of them were away. Mrs. Querril would never leave the house. If some one suggested a walk, she would have a blouse of Evelyn's to finish, or a letter that must be written to dear Uncle Arthur in Nova Scotia.

The grass was becoming wet with heavy dew, and they went inside and lighted up. Mr. Guest had been speeded on his journey, but Decimus came in and sat in the drawing-room. Martin went upstairs to work.

Mrs. Querril drew up her chair under the standard lamp. She was very busy making things for Magda. There were a lot of things darling Magda would be wanting now. She was very lucky to be able to do these little things for her children. They would have dinner late to-night — about eight. That would mean that the boys would come in soon after they had started. At the same time it would be a slight concession to George — not to wait till 8.15 — because he always liked to dine at 7.30. George should have a glass of cherry brandy and a biscuit at seven. That would keep him going.

Decimus was talking to George as usual. What a funny man he was! But he always talked so much, and in such a peculiar topsyturvy way. She found that it made her tired to listen to him for long. He was saying:

“... than that mountebank Euclid! My dear sir, Euclid never evolved one original premise. Give him one of those silly little triangles or circles, and he will spend hours proving a thing which any man with a sense of form can see at a glance. I don't want a man to spend half the morning telling me that any two sides of a triangle are together greater than the third side. I also object to his method of proving that some quite obvious and useless proposition is



wrong and then exclaiming: 'Which is absurd!' This of course is simply rude. It's like putting your tongue out at a student and calling him a fool. If a thing is absurd, why launch into all this talk about it? Why not leave it alone, or else prove that something which appears absurd is really rather sensible?"

A most amusing man!

#### IV

Just before dinner the telephone bell went. Evelyn dashed to it. It was Rodney. The telephone seemed to be working badly. He was very indistinct. She gathered that they had both been delayed and would not be down till the last train, which arrived at 11.20. He wanted to speak to Martin.

Martin went to the telephone. They heard him say:

"Yes . . . yes. All right, old man."

Then he hung up the receiver, and went up to his bedroom.

At dinner they were all very quiet, with the exception of Mr. Querril, who was in one of his Gladstonian moods, which was not a good sign. Evelyn knew that when her father talked about Mr. Gladstone — of whom he had a great ad-



miration — he was always worrying about something. And she could see no connection between the tragic moral relapse of Ptolemy and the Coercion Act in Ireland in 1881.

"Do you remember, Decimus," he was saying, "how he held out for the three F's? Fair rent, fixity of tenure, and free sale?"

Mrs. Quernil looked at her husband admiringly, and said to Evelyn:

"Evelyn darling, get your father some of that 'gentleman's relish'!"

"I do hope he won't sit up for the boys," she thought. "He always will. It's so unnecessary, and they are sure to be all right."

She was always trying to persuade Mr. Querril to retire from business. She disliked London — a dreadful, dangerous place and worse than ever now with all these motor-buses and taxi-cabs. One was always reading of such dreadful things in the papers. One day they would all live down there together. As the children married they would each take a house on the Heath. And then they would be always visiting each other, bringing over each other's babies to play, and exchanging photographs. Chessilton Heath was almost as good as the island. It was free from the element of alarm and distress. There was plenty of time to cross the roadway. The only

danger was from golf balls, and that was only in certain parts of the heath, and then people always called out, "Fore!" so kindly. The villagers and tradesmen were so kind and nice. Every one was kind and good. One only had to believe that people were good, and it brought the good out in them. She always secretly disapproved of "that Settlement." Of course it was right that the boys should be kind and charitable, but she did n't like the idea of them actually going and mixing with "all those people." They might just as well have stopped at home and sent a donation. Poverty and suffering distressed her so that she could not contemplate it. She tried to believe that it did not exist, or that, if it did exist, it was rapidly righting itself somehow. Any book or play which dealt with such things, she would not read or see. She would say:

"There is quite enough of that sort of thing in the world, my dear, without reading about it."

Mr. Querril still continued talking about Gladstone, and Martin with his eyes on his plate, thought:

"Oh, God, I wish he'd stop!"

Mrs. Querril suddenly observed that Martin was looking very pale. She thought:

"I must get Martin some of that stuff that

Jeanne Lemaire was recommending. My dear Martin works too hard."

Her mind quickly reverted to Magda, as it always did when it required relief. Thoughts concerning Magda now were the coziest thoughts in the little boudoir of her mind.

"Somewhere about the beginning of May. Dear me, it's Papa's birthday on the third of May, and Peter's on the seventeenth. I hope the affairs won't clash. What on earth has cook done with these French beans to-night? They're quite brown. . . ."

## V

It was Mr. Querril who suggested that they should sit in Peter's studio after dinner. And thither they all went with the exception of Martin, who remained in the drawing-room to read a novel. But Martin did n't read. He held the novel in front of his eyes and occasionally read a sentence. But across every page there danced before his eyes the words that Rodney had whispered over the telephone:

"Keep calm, old man. Something awful has happened. I can't tell you. Meet me on the 11.15. Say nothing to the others."

Good God? What did it mean? He said

nothing about Peter. Peter had been killed? He felt that Peter had been killed. He sat there shaking, and fingering the leaves of "The Dark Flower" by John Galsworthy.

Upstairs Evelyn turned on the gramophone, and they listened to two songs by Caruso. On an easel by the wall was an unfinished landscape that Peter was going to send to the International Exhibition. It was a low-toned study of a brown field and a few bare trees against a lowering sky. And Peter said he was going to call it "Spring." That was so like Peter! So unlike the normal conception of spring. No fresh green leaves and dancing lambs, but very like spring in some of her moods, bleak and gray, with a suggestion of something behind, something virile being born behind the dark harrows. Mr. Querril smiled sympathetically. Peter's technic was somewhat crude, but the root of the matter was there all right. His canvases were alive with ideas, at present inadequately expressed. What a strange thing it would be if Peter became a great painter! Why not? Not one of the Querrils had ever attained eminence, but they all had ability.

"It is the kind of stock from which genius will sometimes spring," thought Mr. Querril.

Caruso was doing his best to pour some of the

oleaginous vintage of the warm South into this Northern crucible, but for once he failed to arouse enthusiasm.

At ten o'clock Decimus took his departure, and Mr. and Mrs. Querril had a short game of picquet, which Mrs. Querril won and then went to bed. Evelyn followed her.

Martin somehow felt he could not be left alone with his father. He said he would go for a stroll round and then go and meet Rodney.

"You won't sit up, will you, guv'nor?" he said, knowing perfectly well Mr. Querril's reply:

"Eh? Oh, yes, of course I shall sit up!"

He saw him stuffing tobacco into his pipe, and settling down to read. He looked so calm — so utterly unconscious of the "something awful" now rushing towards him in a train from London. Martin choked back a sob of pity, and hurried from the room.

The night had turned cold and dark. He walked briskly across the heath, making a long circular trip. White sign-posts stood up out of the darkness, and he could hear the tinkle of sheep-bells behind an enclosure. Lights were faintly perceptible in the upper rooms of several houses, but many of them were already in darkness. He reached the station half an hour too soon, and plunged hither and thither. Once he



raced back as he saw the lights of a train approaching, but it was only a goods train that went lumbering through. Then he waited beneath a dark wall by the corn chandler's shop.

At last he heard the distant shriek of a whistle, and the 11.15 came languidly along the metals. He stood just outside the gate, with his hat pulled down over his eyes. The train stopped, the engine panting and gasping, like an old lady winded by a nocturnal adventure.

A few people trickled through the booking office. At the end came a man, reeling as though he were drunk. His collar was turned up and his hat was pulled right down over his eyes. It was Rodney. Martin stretched out his hand and gripped him, and as though by mutual consent they said nothing, but hurried on together down the lane. Rodney's face was perfectly white, and his lips quivered. Every moment he gave a little involuntary groan, like a man recovering from the effect of drugs. They reached the field and leaned against the stile—the very stile where Mr. Querril had worried so about young Stallard—a cart went crunching down the lane hard by, and then all was silent. And Rodney buried his face in his hands and groaned.

Martin gripped his brother's shoulders, and whispered:



"What is it, old man? Is he — ?" The word "dead" faded on his lips.

Rodney choked back the tears, and looked up. His eyes were buried in dark rings.

"O God! O God!" he gasped. "I wish he were. I wish he were dead. It's worse than that!"

Martin said nothing, but his breath came quickly.

"They've taken him. They've arrested Peter. They've taken our Peter."

Rodney was crying now and he did n't care. He had wanted to cry all day.

"It's those Troons. They say she's under sixteen. They've arrested him on a charge of criminal assault on a young girl."

Martin could do nothing but convulsively clutch his brother's arms and shoulders. No words would come. He had not yet the relief of tears.

"I've had an awful day. There's nothing to be done. If they find him guilty, he'll go to prison — perhaps for years. Our Peter will go to prison. What are we going to do, Martin? We've got to tell them! We've got to tell them! And Magda does n't know. I had no time to go to Chelsea. I've been with lawyers all day. She'll see it in the newspapers in the morning!"

"Is it all true, Rodney? Did he — ?"

"He spent a night with her in the flat. He's confessed it. But I can't believe she's under sixteen. The man Troon has produced a birth certificate. Is father up?"

"Yes. He's waiting. You're unstrung, old chap. Let me go ahead and — tell him."

Martin was already more concerned about Rodney than about any one. He added:

"Perhaps we won't tell the Mater or Evelyn to-night. After we've told the gov'nor, I'll slip out, and cycle up to London. There are no more trains. I can do it in a few hours. I'll go straight to Magda."

Rodney did not answer. They had come to the gravel path of the carriage drive. A dim light showed in the hall. He stumbled up to the door, and Martin helped him to the porch seat outside. Then he whispered:

"Wait here!"

Martin went straight in. His face had that set look of determination which characterized it when he went in among the cabbages after Ptolemy the Second. He walked quietly but deliberately into the drawing-room, and shut the door. Mr. Querril looked up from his book. Before he had time to speak, Martin said as casually as he could:

"I say, Pater. Rodney has just come in. He's rather done up. There's been a bit of a dust up. Peter, it seems, has got into some sort of silly mess. Of course it's nothing. It'll probably blow over in a day or two. There is a girl mixed up in it or something."

Mr. Querril took off his spectacles and looked mildly alarmed. He didn't understand at all what it was all about. He coughed and said:

"Oh, dear! isn't he coming down to-night then?"

"No. It seems he had to call at a police station or something or other. He probably won't be down for a day or two. We thought we wouldn't tell the Mater or Evelyn about it to-night."

Mr. Querril immediately had a definite position to cling to. There was trouble of some sort, and, "Of course, assuredly no! We wouldn't tell the Mater about it." A great mistake to worry those you love with unnecessary misgivings.

"Of course, quite right! Quite right! Martin," he said, enthusiastically, "no need to tell them. I'm sorry. Where is Rodney? Has he gone to bed?"

"Yes. At least I think he's on his way up. He's got a bad head."

“Oh!” Mr. Querril looked into the fire and rubbed his glasses vigorously. There were a thousand questions he wanted to ask, but — Poor Rodney! How very distressing! Martin too looked very dejected. Perhaps it would be better not to worry them both. Within his breast there was a brief conflict of the sensibilities, and the broader aspect of the case triumphed. It was apparent that both Rodney and Martin were very distressed and upset, and were not anxious to be more communicative to-night. His position as a father — Alone in his bed he would endure the white night of suspense.

## CHAPTER X

### FILM-LAND

#### I

**A**NTONIO CASTRO was an Irishman. At least that was the nationality he frequently claimed. On the other hand, he had sometimes been heard to remark that "one nationality was as good as another to hang a man by," and also that "he'd swop his nationality with a Chink if it would bring him the price of a pot of beer." He was of quite indeterminate age, with curly hair that seemed to have turned prematurely white. His yellow, pock-marked face and keen, malevolent eyes certainly seemed younger than the hair, and the little silver earrings and the tattoo marks extending to the back of either hand added to the general picturesqueness of this human ruffian. Antonio spoke a sailors' language. That is to say, if you put him down in any port in either hemisphere he would, by a cunning combination of pantomime and polyglot expression, obtain anything needful for

the ministration of his material demands. He knew neither fear nor master. He was always willing to eat, drink, fight, or play cards for any stakes with any man.

In the witness box at the Old Bailey he gave his evidence with an easy and insolent assurance, his dark eyes flashing, and the steady grin revealing the line of firm white teeth. Assuredly he had known his friend Jim Troon since the fall in 1888. They had been shipmates together in the *Norman Baron*, plying between the islands of the Malay Archipelago, and again on the oil tank steamer *Don Alfonzo* between 'Frisco and Yokohama. He had known the first Mrs. Troon well. Her maiden name was Maria Ferrati. He could n't say whether she was Italian. She looked it, but he never heard her speak any other lingo than good British. He identified Emma as her daughter. He had occasion to remember her birth, because it happened in the month of November, 1901, and during that winter he was working at the Commercial Road docks and often visited the Troons. He examined the birth certificate with great interest, and nodded his acceptance of the fact that it was a true and proper document. The certificate showed that the birth of Emma Troon had been duly registered at the registrar's office in St. Bride's parish, Stockwell,



in July, 1896, thus proving that she was within two months of her sixteenth year at the time of the assault. It was signed by a registrar, an aged man who was also called to give evidence. He identified the signature and found that it was corroborated by the books of the registry. He had no recollection of "the parties concerned." People were coming in all day to register babies.

## II

The case was over by three o'clock in the afternoon, and Jim Troon and his friend Castro went out of the court together, and made a beeline for the nearest public bar, which happened to be not three minutes' walk away. Jim called for "two three's of gin," and the two men began to recover from the strain of their uncomfortable appearance in a court of law. Jim nodded and winked and muttered:

"Well, we done down the stinking lime-juicers."

The most difficult element in human life which the reformer has to cope with is the element of perversity. There was no real reason why Jim Troon should so detest the Querrils. They had come to him with open arms, anxious to help, to be friendly, and extremely anxious not to ap-

pear patronizing. But there is a primordial streak in most of us, and in men of the type of Jim Troon most particularly, of hatred towards anything which is superior to ourselves. And Jim Troon's hatred was of a particularly ugly kind. His friend Castro raised his glass and remarked:

"Chin Chin! Let the blasted guy rot in chokee! Now what about the gel?"

Jim wiped his mouth and his eyes sparkled.

"You 'eard what the lawyer bloke said. Fifty quid down, and two pounds a week till the—— comes out of quod. Then 'e's to be consulted."

"Yup," replied Castro, "and now what about my little bit?"

"It's a square do," said Jim. "You don't cop me goin' back on me word. It's 'alves all through."

"Good boy!" said Castro, "but the mutton-faced galoot said he was only goin' to pay the money to the gel. She's to fetch it every week."

"Don't you worry! That gel's under age."

And Jim's laugh was not a pleasant thing to hear.

"'E give 'er fifty pound in notes on the spot. And I'm looking for Emma. She cut off directly she had left the stand."

"Your friend Castro will accompany you," grinned the "Irishman."

They had two more of these refreshing drinks, and then boarded a bus to Hammersmith.

### III

After giving her evidence at the trial, Emma went straight home, without waiting to hear the verdict and sentence. The atmosphere of the court frightened her. She did n't understand what it was all about. A gentleman had given her fifty pounds and had promised her two pounds a week for an indefinite period, and this news absorbed her whole interest. It opened up a new vista of life. As far as Peter was concerned, she was sorry but not unreasonably distressed. He was to all intents and purposes finished. Her father had told her that "the young swell" would get two years' hard, and for any one like that, "brought up soft," it would finish them. She shivered when she thought of the delirious moments she had enjoyed with him and that it would never happen again. But still. . . . From the top of the Hammersmith bus her dark eyes were watching the people. There were plenty of them. They were going in and out of shops,

going in and out of restaurants, eating, drinking, laughing, buying clothes, buying jewels and motor cars. Oh, yes, there were plenty of people and things going on . . . a girl must look after herself. Fifty pounds! She could buy a house surely, and go and live in it with servants, and go out to restaurants to dinner. What could n't one buy with fifty pounds? And then a steady income every week without any work to do! A glow of comfortable excitement crept into the eyes of the watcher on the bus.

She found their rooms at the tenement deserted. The stepmother had put on her best bonnet and gone to the trial. So thrilling and entertaining a *cause célèbre* did not occur every day of her life. Emma washed her face and made herself some tea, then she lay on the bed and dreamed. Crowds of little visions danced before her eyes, a foretaste of the splendid experiences to come. She had already peeped behind the curtain, and the scene intoxicated her. She had no idea how long she lay there, before she heard the sound of men's voices singing on the stairs. It was her father and Castro. They came in in their most hilarious mood, with their hats on the backs of their heads, and struck ridiculous attitudes. When her father had sated himself with song he said to Emma:

"So she's lost 'er darlin' boy!"

And Castro broke into some rollicking sea song. Emma watched them both alertly, without speaking. At last her father added:

"She's lost the boy and got a bit of bunce." And Castro went down on his knees to her, and spoke some drunken foreign language as though he were paying court.

"Let's 'ave a look at the little bits o' paper," said Jim at last.

She had dreaded this, and she said sullenly:

"It's my money."

Then Jim was righteously indignant. Did she take him for a thief and scoundrel? Of course it was her money. The young swine had done her down, made a wanton of her, and it was only right the family should pay for it. But she wasn't a financier, was she? She could n't handle notes and bank balances. No, her good father would collect it, pay it into a bank and look after it for her. When she wanted a bit, he would hand it over. She should live in luxury and comfort all her days. It was only right. His daughter was a lady. And Emma watched him with her lazy eyes and suddenly flashed:

"Was that why you drove me to it?"

Then there was very nearly trouble of a

physical kind, and Castro had to intervene with his oily voice and his flashing, dangerous eyes. Eventually Jim got hold of the notes and stuffed them in his pocket. The following morning, to her surprise, he turned up at eleven o'clock with Castro and handed her a sovereign. The rest he said he had "put in the bank for her." Then he and Castro went out, and were not seen again for ten days. They drifted through Hammer-smith, Chelsea, Greenwich, Blackwall, Poplar, Limehouse, and God knows where, eating, drinking, quarreling, playing quoits, faro, and poker, attending dog fights and music halls, and converting Mr. Querril's money into the means of satisfying every mortal lust. Emma waited four days for her father to return, then one morning, when there was a warmth in the air, she rose up and dressed herself in her best, and did up a neat little parcel of her belongings. When her stepmother asked her where she was going, she told her to "mind her own bloody business," and she went out and never returned again to Casement buildings.

## IV

She took a room in Bloomsbury, and called on the lawyer who had handed her the money. He was a kind, oldish man, whose office was in



Lincolns Inn Fields. He said she could have the two pounds every Friday, if she called any time before five o'clock.

Emma found her room very comfortable. She got up late, had all she wanted to eat, sat about the place and made friends with her fellow lodgers, went to cinemas. Life was full and satisfying. She could never get over the emotional thrill of the moving pictures. It was wonderful to step off the pavement on a dull day, and suddenly find oneself whirled into an atmosphere of blazing sunshine in some Italian garden (in New York), where gorgeously beautiful women were badly treated by their fabulously rich husbands. And then to the strains of intoxicating music the drama moved amidst adventures of stolen babies, and diamonds, and government secrets, and the young heroic clergyman who saved the gorgeously beautiful wife in the end. Every one seemed so rich, and so well dressed, and so good looking, and the music was so suggestive of the good things of life.

Emma would return to her room limp and wide-eyed. It occurred to her after a time that she was not rich enough. That two pounds a week was n't so very much after all. She called on the lawyer again, and put her case to him. The cost of living in Bloomsbury was excessive,

and she had incurred expenses and so on. He said he would report her complaints to Mr. Querril. In due course she was informed that her allowance was to be increased to three pounds a week.

On the strength of this accretion of wealth, she moved to a larger room in the same house, stayed longer in bed, ate more, and went to more cinemas. At that time she made friends with a Mrs. Womblesby, a florid, middle-aged lady on the first floor, who had a pink, puffy face beneath its powder, masses of short, fuzzy hair, and little blue earrings. She flattered Emma enormously, and was always talking about her beauty.

"You are a pretty thing," she would say, and then she would nod her head and make funny little clicking noises with her tongue. She drank great quantities of stout, and was always trying to persuade Emma to do the same.

"If you had more blood, my dear, you'd be able to run with the best of them," was another favorite remark. She met some most peculiar men in Mrs. Womblesby's room, and one night Mrs. Womblesby left her alone with a gray-haired gentleman with long legs and boney fingers. He suddenly caught hold of her and kissed her on the lips. She had a terrible

struggle to escape from him and threatened to scream the house down.

When she complained to Mrs. Womblesby afterwards, that good lady exclaimed:

"Reely! Well, I never thought the Major would behave like that," and then she added with a sly little wink:

"E'd 'ave given you a sovereign, I expect, my dear."

And Emma felt no horror at this suggestion. She gazed out of the window at the passers-by and answered sullenly:

"I don't need his sovereigns, thank you."

At last a young man, and Austrian waiter, named Busche, made violent love to her. There was something about him rather fascinating. She had seen his like in the gorgeous rooms of the New York moving pictures. He was redolent of pomade and high life. She gave herself to him, and went to live with him in some rooms in Greek Street, Soho. But the affair lasted only five weeks. She found that he had a violent temper, and he disgusted her in many ways. Moreover, he seemed inclined to throw up his work and to live on her money. They quarreled and fought like two animals, and she left him and went back to Mrs. Womblesby.

But she had acquired a more expensive taste in living. She liked to go out to restaurants, and began to find music halls more thrilling than cinemas. She bought clothes and paste jewelry and got into debt. She again appealed to the Querrils, and to her surprise received a visit from Rodney.

Rodney was kind and polite, but very firm.

"I hope you're not unhappy, Emma," he said. "I don't know what my brother's feelings are in the matter. Perhaps when he is free he may do more for you, but we do not feel justified in making any further advance. However, my father sends you this five pounds to pay any little debts you may have. Don't you think it would be a good idea if you took on some work of some sort?"

She said, "Yes," rather unconvincingly.

"My other brother and I have left the Treves Settlement, but if you will call on the lady superintendent there, she has promised to do whatever she can for you. Will you?"

Emma again said, "Yes," her mind busily occupied with other matters.

She had no intention of going to the Treves Settlement, but she was too frightened of "these clever people" to acknowledge it.

## V

It was on the following Sunday that Emma got her chance. Mrs. Womblesby asked her to accompany her to the Milano Café near Leicester Square. She said she wanted to introduce her to a gentleman who was enormously rich. Emma put on her most alluring clothes and went. The gentleman's name was Mr. Carl Grete. He was a middle-aged man, very broad and strong looking. He had a red face and a black mustache and a not unkind expression in his brown eyes. He fixed them on Emma and did not remove them once during the conversation. In the end he asked her to come to his flat in St. James' the next evening, to dinner with Mrs. Womblesby. Emma went, and Mrs. Womblesby failed to put in an appearance. They dined alone, and it was the most entrancing experience of her life. She had never seen a place like that in real life, only on the film. And it had the added glory of color and comfort and discreet lighting. There were tapestries on the wall, and old furniture, and glittering silver, and an elderly woman who served incredibly beautiful food on pretty plates, and poured out a sparkling drink which seemed to inspire her to an even greater appreciation of the glories of the hour.



And afterwards he sat with her on the settee by the fire, and he kissed her lips and played with her hair. And later he said suddenly:

“Now look here, Emma, I’m a plain business man, and I believe in a plain business deal. I live in Manchester, and I only come to London sometimes. You shall have this flat to live in as your own, you shall have a servant to wait on you, and I’ll give you two hundred a year for yourself, if you’ll be my mistress and promise to run straight when I’m away. What do you say?”

And Emma answered, “Yes,” in the same breathless voice she had replied to Rodney’s question, only on this occasion she meant it.

Mr. Carl Grete was a cotton spinner. He was married and had five charming children living in a large house in the suburbs of Manchester. He was a devoted husband and father, and was known in business as a man of his word. He said:

“Good! Then that’s a fair do! You won’t find me go back on anything I say. And I’ll expect you to stick to your side of the deal. Come to me to-morrow. I’m tired to-night. I’ve had a heavy day in the city.”



## CHAPTER XI

### MR. QUERRIL ASKS FOR CHEESE

#### I

ON the day following Peter's trial and conviction Decimus Postern took up his position lugubriously and alone in the Querrils' drawing-room. The family had spent the previous night in town. Decimus had arrived early and taken advantage of his position as a *persona grata* among the servants (established by liberal tips at Christmas time) to make himself at home till they returned.

He sat for a long time, with his fat hands resting helplessly on his knees, staring into the deserted garden. Autumn flowers were still blooming, and the tennis posts had not yet been taken in. The dogs were nowhere to be seen, but Ptolemy the Second was sleeping innocently in his position on the parapet of the pergola.

Occasionally Decimus would get up and walk heavily about the room and the hall, with his hands behind his back. Once he made an

ambling survey of the house. The first thing which struck him was an enlarged photograph of Peter in the hall. It was taken when he was five. He was a beautiful boy, with podgy cheeks and dark eyes that might have been on the verge of either laughter or tears. He was wearing a velvet frock trimmed with lace, and he was standing on a chair.

Decimus turned away from it. On the staircase were three photographs of Peter; one taken last year working at an easel, one perhaps three years ago in tennis flannels, and another in a group with his mother and Aunt Lena. On the first landing were two more groups in which Peter was conspicuous. He peeped into Mr. and Mrs. Querril's bedroom (the door was wide open). Facing the bed was an enlargement of Peter in a sailor's suit.

"Instruments of torture" was the phrase that occurred to Decimus, and he tiptoed guiltily upstairs and entered Peter's bedroom. Here were only two photographs — one of Mr. and Mrs. Querril, and one of Magda and the dogs. On the walls were several canvases unframed, just stuck on nails. There was Peter's tennis racket in a press against the wall, a row of shoes, a plaster cast on the top of the deal wardrobe. It was all very plain and simple, but what struck

Decimus was that there was something consciously untidy about it, as though some one had dusted the room but had made a point of leaving everything just as Peter had thrown it down. There was a pair of gray flannel trousers flung across the bed, a sketch just begun on the mantel-piece, an open box of charcoal, a pile of water-colors, a cricket bat, two golf-clubs, two old hats on a chair, pipes littering the dressing table, and a canvas over-all hanging limply from an oak easel in the corner.

When Decimus surveyed this room he was conscious of an unpleasant, choking sensation somewhere in his vast breathing apparatus. He turned and walked slowly down the stairs of the deserted house.

When he had regained the drawing-room he sank into the easy chair facing the window.

"What will they do?" he thought, and then, "Instruments of torture!"

He would have liked to have had Tony MacDowell there, but the American boy had gone from Holland to Italy, and had probably heard nothing of the trouble. He wanted to say to Tony:

"You would be surprised, Tony. I don't know how it is, but they're wonderful. You were wrong about your funeral idea. As a matter of

fact, people like the Querrils are more capable of coping with a funeral than with a wedding. Some big trouble brings out all their best qualities. It's in the little things that they go to pieces. But when all is said and done, there's a lot in Querrilism."

## II

He liked that word "Querrilism." There began to stir in his brain the various chaotic imaginings which he recognized as the symptoms of a new book. It would make an excellent book — one of those neat little octavo volumes in what he called "The Wedgwood Series," printed on vellum, with an oval plaque by Angelica Kauffmann on the cover. Of course he could never write such a book. It would be disloyal — in the worst of taste. But all the elements were there. And curiously enough it would be a book not so much on his views on Querrilism, but on his views of Tony's views on Querrilism.

"Querrilism through Western eyes."

No. Too much like Joseph Conrad. Perhaps in pamphlet form, "Querrilism. It's cause and cure." Or, "The perils of the Querrils." No, all too flippant.

Decimus had a lot of time on his hands. Tor-

rents of words, emotions, deductions, and apothegms jumbled together in his brain.

"The basic evil of Querrilism is that it is an attempt to divert the natural channels of individual expression. A force, without prejudice or predilection, believing only in good, ignoring the element of conflict in human affairs, is bound eventually to destroy or pervert itself."

That would be an excellent beginning. (Inspired by Tony. Tony would be a useful man in the offices on Adelphi Terrace.) What was it he said about "eating each other up"? But they had surprised him. Their solicitude for each other in the crash of doom had buoyed them up. They suffered in silence and alone. They were "gentlemen." Mr. Querril, with all his limitations, was a unique gentleman. You might kill a Querril, but could not divert the flow of Querrilism. The point required expounding:

"It may be said of Querrilism that in any case it has great powers of resilience. It is the herd-instinct carried to a phenomenal degree. Entomologists tell us that the ant individually is a perfect fool. He has n't any idea what he's doing. He will climb a steep boulder carrying an enormous load when he might just as easily walk around it. He will do utterly senseless and unnecessary things repeatedly. If you tread on



his nest, he loses his head, and behaves like a thing distraught. The herd-instinct for the time being evaporates. It depends upon some quite unaccountable wave of instinct for the fevered activities of reconstruction to begin. This cannot be said of Querrilism. It is a conscious herd-instinct. It knows what it is doing. It does not lose its head. If you tread on its nest it begins its fevered reconstruction instantly. If the Querril ant is crushed, the other ants are so concerned about the feelings of each other they have no time to suffer about their own. They close up their ranks spiritually. They become more intensely a herd."

And then suddenly something seemed to snap in Decimus. The tears started to his eyes, and his great body shook.

"O God!" he groaned. "What will they do? What will they do?"

He buried his face in his hands and was very silent. No more words came to illumine the dark spaces of his emotion. The day began to draw in. He rose at last, and stood by the window. The tennis lawn looked neat and trim. A few late roses were spilling their abundance in little pools of red and white. A mass of yellow flowers stood out boldly against the Lemaires' fence. It all looked very sane and



placid, supremely conscious of the genial hours of its past and of the "ghosts of lovers," supremely innocent of the wild, unreasoning disaster hovering above its fading loveliness.

### III

And then through the little gate at the end of the garden there came a figure in a gray cloak. It was Annette. She came dilatorily along the grass paths, looking stonily at the tennis court and the flowers. And Decimus knew that her mind was occupied with thoughts very similar to his. She seemed to be looking at each flower and saying:

"What will they do? O God! what will they do?"

She walked so slowly it appeared to be difficult to drag one leg after another. Once she swayed, and he thought she was going to fall. He went to the window and called gently:

"Annette!"

The face of a friend seemed to steady her. She nodded at him sagely and increased her pace a little. He saw her amble up the path and disappear into the house. After a moment or two she entered the room, and he went forward to meet her. The pupils of her eyes were distended and her cheeks were damp. She crept towards

him aimlessly, and he kissed her on the cheek. She gave a faint little sigh and muttered:

"Dessy dear."

But all the life had gone out of her voice. She drifted by him to the window and looked up at the sky. Her lips were parted, and her hands were crossed on her breast. Decimus could see that her whole body was shaking, and yet the tears would not come.

Suddenly she said in a dry voice:

"Soon the willow herb will be out, and he won't be here. . . ."

She continued to nod her head in a wise fashion, as though she were communing with the God who had the ordering of herbs and shrubs and little people's lives. Then she continued dispassionately:

"We used to go up to Folly's head about this time. The bracken is all yellow . . . and the rabbits go scampering away under the ferns. Do you remember the day he lost his hat? We hunted for it in rabbit holes for half an hour and then he remembered that he'd never brought one!"

She laughed mirthlessly and exclaimed: "That was so like Peter! So like my Peter!"

Suddenly she turned on Decimus and threw herself in his arms.

"Oh, Dessy dear, it is n't true! Tell me it is n't true! It's all a mad dream. They can't take him. They can't take my Peter! They can't take my Peter!"

Thank God, she was crying! The big friend of the family held her tight. He stroked her disordered hair — beautiful, wavy, brown hair — He was choking himself but he managed to say:

"There, there, it will be all right, dear . . . he'll come back! He'll come back!"

But she clung to him and shook and gripped his arms convulsively. And suddenly she laughed horribly, and Decimus was frightened. He helped her to a couch and rang the bell for the servants. With the help of Mrs. Yardley, the loyal and ancient housekeeper of the Querrils, and one of the maids, they coaxed her up to one of the bedrooms. And then Mrs. Yardley insisted on putting her to bed, and giving her two hot-water bottles and some sal-volatile. She had a great faith in hot-water bottles. There was no ailment of body or soul that could not be to an extent relieved by hot-water bottles. And her message of consolation was:

"There, there, dearie, we all have to go through it. You put one on your feet and one on your tummy and you'll be all right."

In the meantime Decimus telephoned for the

local doctor. And then he thought to himself:

"Poor child! I shall never forget that laugh of hers. It was horrible, horrible! Nature is intensely cruel. But this may help matters. It will be a diversion. Perhaps just the very thing that was wanted!"

#### IV

And indeed the breakdown of poor Annette was not without its helpful side. When the family arrived an hour later, looking white and disheveled, like a concourse of attendant ghosts hovering round each other, Decimus was able to greet them with the arresting announcement:

"Annette is here. We've put her to bed. I'm afraid she's very unwell."

The news seemed to produce an immediate flush of vitality in the group. They were converted from ghosts to animate creatures. All the women-folk dashed up to the bedroom, their minds and bodies occupied. The men went into the drawing-room with Decimus.

Mr. Querril looked older and somehow smaller. His face appeared pinched, and he had not washed since the morning — a most unusual and significant lapse — but he was extravagantly calm and detached. He cross-questioned Deci-

mus about Annette's collapse, and asked which doctor he had telephoned to. When informed that it was Dr. Fox, he remarked :

"Fox! I'm glad you sent for Fox. He's a good chap, takes a lot of trouble and does n't fuss. I like him better than Whitehead, though Whitehead's clever. I believe he has taken more degrees and so on, but he's brusque in his manner, and he always smells so confoundedly of Harris tweed."

Of the trial, and of Peter, not a word! The process of closing up spiritually had commenced. The boys hovered round their father admiringly, but with an expression which seemed to suggest that they thought that any minute he might vanish through the floor or the ceiling. Only once that evening was there a definite breakdown. During an interval of attending on Annette, Mrs. Querril, who was sitting on the couch by the fire, suddenly burst into tears. She was soothed in silence by Magda — who had come down with the rest — Nothing was said.

Dinner was announced shortly afterwards, and Mrs. Querril said she "really could n't," but Magda took her arm and said :

"You must, darling."

And they went into the dining-room. No one ate anything, but they all made a great show of



flashing knives and forks, and pretending to be comparatively normal. Martin drank an enormous quantity of water, and Mrs. Querril was persuaded to have a glass of port.

Decimus tried to keep his eye from the photograph of Peter — an enlarged head — just above the sideboard, but it kept wandering back to it, and the insistent voice of the phrasemaker would still juggle with words:

“Broadly speaking there are two blocks of people, East and West; people who interfere, and people who don't interfere; people who are content, and people who have the genius of dissatisfaction. One of our jocund poets has said, ‘East is East, and West is West.’ This is only partly true. East is most certainly East, but West is West and a bit more. West is West with a touch of North and South, a touch of East, and a big touch of the stars. East is a fatalist, and West is an idealist of a clumsy sort. East believes in a millennium, a condition predicating a static condition of the soul; West believes in pushing on the best way it can to a better — but still fluid — order of society. ‘Neither the twain shall meet,’ said the jocund poet. But they *will* meet, because the West will go out and meet the East, and in time will get to know all about the East. For too long has the West been mes-



merized by the East, like a schoolboy in the presence of an aged grandfather. And the West will in time absorb and control the East, because it is more restless, because it is dissatisfied, because it has greater vitality. And it is vitality which counts. 'For that is the law of the Jungle, O Best Beloved!'"

When everybody thought that the pantomime of eating was finished, Mr. Querril suddenly exclaimed:

"I'd like some cheese."

## V

This explosive demand seemed to arouse Mrs. Querril. She looked round, with the expression of the hen-mother amidst a brood of chicks suddenly conscious of her responsibilities.

"Lydia," she said, addressing a maid, "I believe there's some of that Wensleydale left. Bring it in for the Master."

And the cheese formed an excellent topic for Mr. Querril to dilate upon.

"Decimus, my dear good fellow, you must try some of this. It's excellent, like a Stilton only milder. The flavor is very subtle. A cousin of mine — James Querril, do you know him? — charming fellow! runs a model farm near Whitby — he sent it to us at Whitsuntide."

Mr. Querril talked exhaustively about cheeses, the rival flavors of Cheshire, and Cheddar, the beauty of a "really good old Stilton," about a restaurant in the Strand where you could get Camembert thirty-five years old. And while he spoke, the mind of the essayist was very busy :

"Now here is a remarkable example of Querrilism and indeed of the Western temperament. On such a night as this the Eastern would have sat in a hair shirt in his temple, praying. He would have made his women-folk do the same. He would have said, 'All is darkness about me. My son is dead to me. He has sinned against Thy holy covenant. Ah! woe is me! woe is me!'" But the Westerner in this critical hour suddenly exclaims, 'I want some cheese.' Not because he really wants cheese, but because he's not thinking of himself. He's closing up his ranks spiritually. It's a stronger attack. It's heroic. It's terrific!"

And so in the trials of that day Decimus discovered many compensations, and one compensation that made him almost delirious. Some time after dinner Magda touched his arm and said:

"Dessy, will you come up to — to the studio for a moment?"

He followed her heavily to the top of the house.

When they entered the studio, she turned on the electric light and shut the door. She peered about the room, and touched an overall of Peter's that was hanging on an easel. And then to his surprise she suddenly said:

"Oh, Decimus dear, hold me in your arms a moment. I want to cry. I want to have a good cry."

Decimus did as he was bidden. For the second time that day he became a father-confessor, the big friend of the family. But it was somehow different holding Magda in his arms to holding Annette. He was intensely conscious of the faint perfume of that beautiful hair tickling his nose and chin. He was enthralled and flattered, although he knew that the appeal was anything but flattering. He knew quite well that she was merely using him as a medium of relief. She wanted to cry with some one who did n't matter. He was just outside the immediate circle of Querrilism, but not so far outside that he could not be trusted to know how to behave. He was sympathetic and quite safe. And Decimus knew all that, and it wounded him a little, but he did know how to behave. Two large tears trickled down his cheeks and mingled with her hair. She dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief, and he felt her bosom heaving as she gasped:

"Oh, darling Peter! Where is he now? What are they doing to him? They'll kill him!"

And the big man replied hoarsely:

"No, no, Magda, he'll be all right. He'll come back!"

She fumbled with his coat and her handkerchief, and continued talking in little jerky sobs:

"It's all so cruel . . . Peter could n't possibly have understood. . . . Why did n't some one tell him? He's only a little boy himself. O God! He's not capable of doing anything wicked. Peter has never had an unkind, cruel thought in his life. Peter is innocent, pure, a darling! Everybody knows it. . . . Oh, what does it all mean, Dessy? What does it all mean?"

And the maker of epigrams could think of nothing better to say than:

"He'll come back, Magda dear, he'll come back. Of course he did n't understand. . . ."

And then as though inspired by the collect of the day he added:

"We must think of the others, Magda."

She squeezed his arm and gasped:

"Oh, I know, I know. It's the only thing that keeps one going at all. But one has to cry sometimes if only in secret, and — thank you so much, Dessy dear, you've been so sweet. I've got to

be so brave now, perhaps it's a little different for me. Thank you so much. Let us go down. I won't make a fool of myself again."

## VI

In the hall they passed Ptolemy the Second. He came out of the drawing-room, yawning. He walked languidly towards the kitchen, stretching out each leg with a slow, ecstatic movement, as though it were a form of sensuous joy not to be hurried over. On perceiving Decimus, he put back his ears with an expression of disgust, and disappeared.

Probably no one of "the Querril set" slept well that night, with the exception of Annette, who had been given a powerful sleeping draft. Though at dawn Magda slept for three hours, her hair scattered in wild profusion on the pillow, but her face relaxed and placid, like a child's.

And during the small hours Decimus enjoyed moments of at least semi-consciousness. The leaves of the eternal book kept turning backwards and forwards, the thoughts tumbling over each other:

"It resolves itself then into a question as to the degree to which this principle of self-effacement may be applied. One cannot quarrel with

love as a principle. One can only insist that love shall fortify and not stultify the individual. Love comes in so many disguises . . . and the perfume of her hair . . . what is it? . . . opoponax faintly . . . opoponax and something more, the essence of life, tears and laughter . . . the breath of a woman standing in the presence of a miracle. . . ."



## CHAPTER XII

### PETER'S LETTER TO TONY MACDOWELL

"I AM writing this diary to you, Tony, for a very good reason. It is with the idea of keeping sane. My thoughts, feelings, black terrors, and despairs are so confused that I want desperately to detach some concrete arrangement from them. The act of setting something down may be a sedative, however trifling and inconsequent it may appear to read. So you see it is quite a selfish letter, written more for my own benefit than for yours. My greatest difficulty is to convince myself that I am indeed identically the same person that I was before the trial, that the qualities I had then are still mine. But everything works against this conviction. The atmosphere of the court and the prison have mesmerized me into a belief that I am an entirely different person, that virtues and impulses and dreams which I then enjoyed are now the property of some one else, and that they will never be mine again.

"During those early days when out of the clear blue vault of heaven there came this sudden bolt of destruction, I was too consumed with the aspect of the result to give much attention to the cause. I was indeed only able to think of myself in relation to the appalling cloud of sorrow I had brought into the lives of those I loved. I could think of nothing but my mother's face as she looked at me across the court, of my father, and of Martin, and Rodney, and Magda, and Evelyn. It seemed incredible that I could have been so cruel to them. It seemed incredible that any one, or any system, or any form of social action, could be so cruel to any one. The contemplation of their suffering nearly drove me mad. I wished to God I had been an orphan without relatives of any sort, and then perhaps I could have faced this thing in the spirit of a man. I could have retained my individuality, and found some salve within myself. As it was, the vision of my family's grief whipped me into a thousand fragments, and when I came back to that poor thing that was myself it seemed so pitiable an object it made me shudder. Again and again I tried to encompass it, to take it by the scruff of the neck and to say to it:

" 'Come now, it's not all finished. Remember . . . remember . . . remember.'

"And for a time I lived in little episodes of my past life, and tried to convince myself that they were real and intimate. I could see Rodney missing a low drive of mine at tennis, and could hear him calling out:

"'Oh, good shot, Pedro!'

"I could see Magda swaying on the piano stool, her shoulders slightly raised as she weighed the keys, and her gentle voice:

"'A shade faster, darling.'

"I could hear Martin ragging me, and sometimes even my own voice calling him 'a hoary old porpoise.'

"All these things were still mine. They could n't take them away from me if I fought hard for them.

"Of the unspeakable thing itself, I could only contemplate it in its effects on these visual relations. In some ways I was surprised at my own lack of compunction. Neither could I persuade myself that the offense was of the vile nature which the law proscribed. I had no standard of values in the matter to go by. I could only judge by my intuitions, and I could not believe that any experience so crowned by beauty, and so utterly devoid of any element which appeared against the grain of nature or of instinct could be vile. Even at that time I harbored some vague suspicion

that there must be a mistake. The sentence suggested cruelty, and God knows I am not capable of cruelty, though there I found myself a passive medium of the most unspeakable cruelty to my own parents and brothers and sisters. If the other thing had been cruel and vile, I cannot but believe that I should have had some inkling. That I behaved rashly, that in very truth I 'lost my head,' I was intensely conscious. But that I had wronged Emma, I could not believe. All that was best in me was eager for her good. I had determined — impulsively perhaps — to wrap my life round hers. I was going to devote my whole time and energies in furthering her happiness. I have often wished since that I had told you of my feelings towards Emma.

"One day after I had been five weeks in this place we were exercising in the yard. There was an unusual warmth in the air for November. I looked up at the pale rim of sky above the roofs. I thought inevitably of the sky above the heath, and I remembered a certain night when I had seen Emma's face among the fruit trees in the Lemaires' garden. The air had the tender feeling that suggests that Nature is imparting a gentle caress upon the brow of all humanity, and as though we were all being drawn closer together by this act. It suddenly occurred to me that if I

could only convince myself that mine was a venial offense, it would be easier to help my people; that the mute anguish which I knew they suffered might become less. I might be able to find myself again, and to believe that my individuality was identical to what it was before the trial.

"For now let me set down a terrifying fact. No man is capable of withstanding this black magic of the law. It mesmerizes, blinds, and destroys one. Even if I had been entirely innocent but had been found guilty, I could not have escaped that paralyzing sense of being placed outside the pale. It is not like being condemned by human beings but like being exorcised by the chilling verdict of perpetuity.

"It seems to represent the opinion of all the inhuman ghosts who have ever dared the boards of history, with its ponderous solemnity, its medieval appanages, its uncompromising attention to meticulous phrasing, its ice-cold insistence upon the letter of precedent and tradition. It picks you up, looks right through you, tears out your heart, and throws you aside — a thing that can never find itself again, a thing that will always be afraid of its own shadow.

"And this prison is full of these husks, these gray bodies mesmerized into the belief that they



have lost their soul. I see around me their white faces, grinning pitiably in a kind of weak obedience to an elemental fate. It was in the contemplation of them that my own revolt began. With almost a sense of satisfaction I realized that I could pity them even more than I pitied myself. And then I knew that something of me in any case was as it was before the trial. And I fought for that thing with all my might. I reasoned that if I had that faculty I probably had other faculties. I yearned to help them, and so by this means I gradually began to reinstate myself. And it was partly under the influence of this revelation that I began to write these thoughts down.

“Other convictions crowd upon me, and one central fact which I could hardly realize when living at Chessilton Heath. I sometimes had vague suspicions of it when working at the Settlement at Hammersmith, but here I feel it established beyond dispute. It is this: The *majority* of people are unhappy, Tony. One may say that in the position I find myself I am not an unprejudiced observer, but I am not judging by the pale ghosts who surround me here. I am speaking from an acquired experience and from observation. And the reflection is appalling. I italicize the word *majority*, because that is the



whole point of the indictment. If a few people were unhappy, or even a fairly large minority, it might be explicable; but think of this — Here we have the whole of human society evolved through millions of years of suffering, and sacrifice, and love. We have the experience of millions of men and races. We have the vast stores of their labors to help us, the comfort of their faiths, the revelations of their teachers and our own. We have the benefit of the restless strivings of reformers, artists, seers. And with all this, what have we built? — a house of Fear!

“We may build a little nest at the top, like our home at Chessilton Heath. We may be happy ourselves, but down beneath is that vast groaning basement of despair, and all the dark rooms of misery and hopelessness, where Fear stalks exultantly. Sometimes he even comes up and bares his yellow fangs at us, and we shrink together, mesmerized. And often we go down and grope our way into the dark rooms, murmuring to these others:

“‘It’s all right! It’s all right!’

“And we distribute our little doles of soup, and soap, and patent pills, but we do not drive out Fear. The house is haunted like this prison. Somewhere, at sometime, something has gone wrong.

dreams were ghoulish, and though I still do not sleep well my dreams are sometimes beautiful and comforting.

"And the other night I had a queer dream about you, Tony. I was strolling along the cliff at Babbicombe with you. I remember going down that zigzag path to the shore, and we wandered for some time and then sat down on the sand. The sky was immense, and the narrow line of sea that turgid gray-green color you see in some of Whistler's water-colors. The waves were breaking in little angry ripples. And suddenly, close by us on the shore, I observed a woman. She was tall and very beautiful, and dressed in a shell-colored frock. She was gazing out to sea, with her lips parted, and her eyes reflecting the restless movement of the waters.

"There was something so appealing and splendid about her I could not take my eyes from her. At last I whispered to you:

" 'Who is that?'

"And you were busy sketching in a note-book, but replied casually:

" 'Oh, that's the fore-shore woman.'

" 'The fore-shore woman!' I said. 'What do you mean by a fore-shore woman?'

"You did not reply, and I added:

" 'Why does she gaze out to sea?'

"Then you said:

" 'Did you ever see any one stand on the shore and gaze at the land?'

"I had to acknowledge that the sea perhaps had a greater appeal, and you continued, sententiously:

" 'The sea is something of an aristocrat. You must remember that at one time the world was *all* sea. That's why the sea looks upon the land as rather bourgeois, as a sort of *nouveau arrivée*, and that's why the sea is always lashing the skirts of the land with these white thongs.'

" 'But who is the fore-shore woman?' I insisted.

" 'The fore-shore woman is the only thing he is afraid of,' you replied. 'You see he made the love light in her eyes. That's why he does n't overrun the land. He knows that if he has once made the love light he dare n't destroy it. And every year he becomes less and less. He's wearing himself out with anger, and his own mad love of her. For it is n't for him the love light was created.'

" 'Who was it created for then?'

" 'Oh, some thug way over the other side of his horizon.' And you laughed.

" 'Tony,' I said, 'you are keeping something back from me. I seem to know her. I have seen

those eyes before, either in this life or in some previous existence. I must know her. Who is she?'

"But you merely shrugged your shoulders, and rubbing a portion of your sketch down with the ball of your thumb you repeated:

"'She's the fore-shore woman!'

"How much older I seem now than you, Tony! I am an old man and you will always be a boy, wiping out a sketch with the ball of your thumb. Sometimes these queer dreams come to me and help me; but for the most part I live among uncertain realities, I live among uncertain realities."

This sentence was repeated, and the letter came to an abrupt stop.

## CHAPTER XIII

### TONY IN REQUEST

#### I

**I**T surprised many people that the Querrils did not leave Chessilton Heath. The general view was that in such cases it is better to clear out and make a fresh start elsewhere. The affair created considerable discussion and a pretty broad social cleavage. Many families cut them definitely, but the majority remained loyal, and their more intimate friends treated them with a greater show of affection than ever. The orthodox opinion was expressed by Sir Phillip Lowring, the local brewer and art patron. He said to his wife:

“I should n’t cut them, my dear, but I should n’t be too friendly. Old Querril is not a bad sort in his way. A man can’t help having a profligate son. There’s usually a black sheep in every family.”

Those who knew them well knew that to move would be the last thing they would be likely to

do. It would be disloyal to Peter, a betrayal of their most sacred sentiments, a confession that they could not endure "the instruments of torture."

It was a relief when the tennis court could be dismantled, but the photographs of Peter in his velvet suit, his sailor suit, in his many other costumes, remained conspicuously in evidence. Some one eventually folded up the gray flannel trousers, and put them away in a drawer, and the box of charcoal was closed and put in a cupboard with the pipes, but everything else remained identically the same, from the unfinished painting of "Spring" to the butterfly-net and the ghost-like overall awaiting its owner.

And on the days when visitors were allowed to visit the prison, Mrs. Querril would put on her best black satin frock (it is always well to dress in your best when visiting a prison), and she would keep herself remarkably well in hand. She would peer at the ghostly and almost unrecognizable Peter through two rows of iron bars and always began with the same remark:

"It won't be long, darling. Everything is waiting for you. Everything will be just the same when you come home."

The conversations were extraordinarily difficult and embarrassing. The really big things



could not be talked about. It was far worse than talking on a telephone. The dialogue consisted mostly of scrappy bits of information about the family and friends, and a brave show on Peter's part of being quite comfortable and cared for. It was almost a relief to both sides when the warder gave the signal that time was up.

But during the ensuing winter both Mr. and Mrs. Querril aged considerably. Mr. Querril's stoop became more pronounced, his movements fussier and jerkier, and his conversations more discursive and meandering. And his wife began to develop that symptom which characterizes many elderly people — of living almost exclusively in the past. It was as though her mind had stopped in that fatal October. She was the only member of the family who was allowed occasionally to break down when some little symbol of association became too poignant. And after the first flush of this revived grief, she would begin to talk quite openly about Peter, but always of the past.

## II

She would tell her friends little stories of Peter when he was a small boy, or quote some quaint saying of his when quite a baby. And

this did not seem to distress her. In these moods she seemed to be able to pull down the shutter over these present terrible happenings.

They went through those months broken-hearted and silently disconsolate, each one struggling to bear the burden cheerfully "for the sake of the others." They abolished games and the Sunday evening music, but occasionally in a mood which almost amounted to bravado they would all go and sit in Peter's studio and talk or read, and on one or two occasions experimented with the gramophone, but on one of these occasions Mrs. Querril broke down, and they did not play it again. When Mrs. Querril had dried her eyes, she said to Aunt Lena, who happened to be staying there at the time:

"He was such a boy for fruit, my dear. Do you remember that occasion when old Sir George Bulbridge found him in his orchard eating his apples, and Sir George came up and said very sarcastically: 'Oh! and may I ask why you are eating my apples?' and Peter said without any hesitation: 'Yes, sir — for medical reasons.' And it was quite true. He was only eight at that time, and you know what boys are; he had had some trouble, and the doctor had told him he must eat all the fruit he could. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! He was n't such a bad old fellow, old Sir

George; he told the story against himself afterwards. I did n't know him. I only got to hear it through the Tracys, those picture-gallery people over at Clemin-Stratton. They were so amused! 'Medical reasons'! Peter was always like that!"

Christmas, more like a chapter from the Inquisition than a week of festival, came and went, and the months crawled by. The Treves Settlement ceased to exist. It never survived the public scandal brought upon it by Peter's case. All sorts of wild rumors regarding it were spread broadcast and even got into the press. Abuse of it came from those who had benefited by its activities, as well as from people who knew nothing about it. The gentle Mrs. Basingstoke closed the place down and went up to Leeds, where she continued her good work on identically the same lines. She regretted parting with the Querrils, and the Parthian shaft, which sprang to her lips when she said good-by to Rodney: "Good-by, Mr. Querril. If you had taken my advice. If you had n't interfered . . ." was never spoken. Instead she held his hand and said:

"I'm grieved that our work together is over. But don't lose heart. You boys, all the three of you, are young. You've got all the world before you."

The Querrils never heard from her again. When she died three years later, as the result of an accident to her spine, caused by being knocked down in the street by a drunken carter in the suburbs of Leeds, she was a comparatively poor woman. She had given all her life and money to the poor, because she could think of nothing better to do. And she passed quite unnoticed.

### III

Two events of great importance happened to the Querrils in the spring. The first was the arrival of Tony MacDowell. He came back at the beginning of May and went straight down to Chessilton Heath. His presence acted like a tonic. There was no reserve about Tony, no family stranglehold upon his power of individual expression. He went straight in to Mrs. Querril and gripped her hand and said:

"Mrs. Querril, I was fair dazed to hear about Peter. The thing simply got me. Don't you believe it; there's some crazy mistake about all this. Peter's a white man, through and through. I'd go through hell for him."

No one else would dream of talking to Mrs. Querril like this. In fact, no one else would think of broaching the subject of Peter at all,

but Mrs. Querril did not seem to mind. On the contrary, her face flushed slightly with pleasure. She pressed his hand and murmured:

“Mr. MacDowell! Mr. MacDowell!”

She did not cry, as the rest of the family dreaded. She gazed meekly out of the window as though she were suddenly confronted with some new and encouraging aspect of the case. Tony was persuaded to stay, and his visit was a complete success.

Of course there was no idea of his being a kind of substitute for Peter, but he did quite unconsciously to a certain extent enact that part. He was a boy in the house, of about the same age, and Peter was fond of him. He did the same kind of work, and entertained them all day with his quaint philosophy and his unexpected way of expressing himself. He was quite impervious to the “instruments of torture.” He talked continually about Peter and his work, in a matter-of-fact way, as though Peter was away staying with friends. And Mrs. Querril liked to listen to him. The striking difference in their mental attitude was that Mrs. Querril would only talk of Peter’s past, and Tony would only talk of Peter’s future.

And it did not seem sacrilege for Tony to use Peter’s studio. Peter would like it. Besides,



Tony was principally a portrait painter, which seemed to make just a comfortable difference. He painted portraits of Evelyn, and Mrs. Le-maire (Magda was not well enough to sit). He did odd jobs about the house, mended the lawn-mower, washed the dogs, "jollied" the family when they were down, put them wise on the suffrage question which was then raging, of which he was a keen advocate, criticized their friends and neighbors, beat them at tennis, gave Mr. Querril advice about the way to conduct a literary review, fetched parcels from the station, and acted as a veritable *deus ex machina* on the night when Magda's baby was born.

## IV

Which brings us to the second important event. There is something about the clamorous arrival of a baby which is irresistible. It may be said in some respects to resemble an aëroplane — in that, although we may have seen thousands in our time, whenever we hear one we have to rush to the window. All babies are remarkable, in fact they are all more remarkable than any other babies, but Magda's baby was of course more remarkable than the most remarkable baby that ever yelled its way into popular imagina-



tion. It was a girl, and of course was called Jenny after Mrs. Querril. If the alternative disaster had happened to it, it was to have groped with the problems of life under the name of George. As an antidote to the febrile atmosphere of the household at that time, Jenny was immense. She cared not for Querrils or Capels, nor for tradition or sentiment, nor even for the welfare of a dissolute uncle slinking in prison. She arrived with a self-centered determination to get a grip on life. She took stage-center with the assurance of a popular musical-comedy artist. In comparison, Ptolemy the Second was an altruist. For anything not concerning a bottle or her immediate material demands, she had no use.

A new light seemed to come into Mrs. Querril's eyes. She went backwards and forwards between the various bedrooms, examining first the child, then the mother, then the things she had been so laboriously making in anticipation of this event. Before being fully conscious in the morning she would again feel diffused with the prescience of some pleasant experience. And when she did awake her first thought was:

"Yes. It is quite true. Now there is another one . . . little Jenny. How sweet she looked when she laughed at my hand-mirror yes-

terday. I wonder whether Martin has his camera down here. Her eyes are lighter than Magda's. I suppose they're more like John's. But any one can see she's a Querril."

When John arrived a fortnight later on a special "compassionate leave," he had to be reprimanded and called to order. He obviously knew nothing about babies. He tossed it up into the air and caught it, and made such an incredible noise, shouting and singing, that they were terrified. He held it in such an awkward way that Mrs. Querril was convinced he would drop it, or make it cry.

It must be said for Miss Capel that she took all this in very good part. She blinked surprisingly at the owner of the clear gray eyes and the boisterous manners, as though she recognized that he was a god with some peculiar authority to interfere with her autocratic existence. She gripped handfuls of his face, and gurgled with satisfaction when the mouth made abortive efforts to bite her.

Lieutenant Capel had only three days' leave, and it was a very crowded time, but on his last evening after dinner he suddenly took Tony by the lapel of his coat and said:

"I say, MacDowell, come down the garden with me. I want to have a chat."

When they had reached the shrubbery at the other end of the garden, and pipes had been duly filled and lighted, Capel said :

"You were away at the time of the trial, were n't you, MacDowell?"

"Yes, I was in Italy."

"I was there two days. The second day, and the day of the conviction."

John hesitated, and then interjected :

"I suppose you have n't any time on your hands?"

"My time's my own, thank God! If there's anything I can do . . ."

"It's like this. I can't do much. I'm so tied up. But there were things about the trial that struck me as quaint. There was a man named Castro —"

"I know, the Dago!"

"Yes. That man would sell his own mother for a quart of gin. I did n't believe a word of his evidence. Jim Troon's not much better. I saw them enter a pub together immediately after the result was announced. I did n't like their manners. There was something oily. They were much too pleased about it all. I got some one on their track. They both went on the blind for days. They spent money like dirt. One night they had a quarrel, and Castro said some-

thing about blabbing if the other man did n't hand over some more brass. Then they made it up, and Troon went back to Hammersmith, and Castro disappeared. And we can't find any trace of him at all. He probably took ship somewhere, but we can't find any seaman registered under that name, and we can get nothing out of Troon."

The gray face of Tony MacDowell appeared watchful and alert above his pipe.

"Do you want me to track Castro? Is that the idea, Capel?"

"I don't want to convert you into a bally detective, but I'd like to get hold of Mr. Castro."

## V

Tony looked up at the white gables of the house. Then he said:

"I take it you have some idea about this?"

"Yes, it's quite a simple-idea. I don't believe that Emma Troon was under sixteen!"

"Gee! I'd give ten years of my life to prove that! I wish they'd let me know. Reading the account it all seemed such plain sailing. It never occurred — that there could be any loop-hole — in an English court, with all those big-wigs! There was the birth-certificate and all."

"I know. I have no definite grounds to go on. It's simply an instinct. You had to be at the trial to appreciate it. In the first place, the girl looks more like eighteen or nineteen. Of course she's Italian stock. Then her father is a moral pervert, and all the witnesses they called looked as though they ought to be in jail. And then there's Peter. Is Peter the sort of chap who would seduce a little girl? Of course he acknowledges that he slept the night with her, and that he had had something to drink. But you know what he is. His own lawyer could n't get out of him the proper details of that night. He said he had been a blackguard and lost his head. Even in court he did n't say what his lawyer had put him up to say, although he put him into the box on purpose. He was an appalling witness. He talked about the Russian ballet, and all that sort of thing. You never heard such stuff! Of course the jury immediately jumped to the conclusion that he was a moral pervert. Any reference to art or the emotions will convince a British jury that you're a wrong 'un."

Tony followed this impression of John's with little intermittent ejaculations of "My!" Then he gripped the other's hand and said:

"Listen now, John; you've no idea how I appreciate your telling me all this. I was al-



ways dead sure that Peter was a white man, but my! an English court of law! . . . Well, now, just give me Troon's address, and I'll get right on to this."

The lieutenant's eyes twinkled.

"I had an idea you'd be a good man for this job! I believe I hear the baby."

The lieutenant sprang down the embankment and ran across the garden. And Tony watched him go. A few minutes later he heard his invigorating laugh in the little room above the cherry tree. A warm glow of light irradiated from the window. The cries of the child subsided. He thought he heard Magda's voice. A nightingale started the prelude to its song, in the hedge beyond the Lemaires' garden. And Tony continued sitting there on the wooden bench, and smoking. He never took his eyes from the little window. It looked like an illuminated nest up in the trees. And a queer expression came to his plain features. He was thinking very hard. But who could tell what would be the thoughts of a superphilosopher at such a moment?



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE WRESTLING MATCH

#### I

ON the following day Tony MacDowell vanished. When he announced his intention of going, there was a chorus of dismay, but he said:

"No, I must go. I was getting on fine here till this baby came, and now I feel I'm superseded. I'm just jealous."

And Magda said:

"Oh! Tony, you *mustn't* go! What will Jenny do without you?"

"Believe me, Jenny's as good at looking after number one as Tony MacD is!"

"But where are you going, Tony MacD?"

"I'm going up to that crazy little hamlet of London to see whether father has taken home the washing."

"You're an enigma, Tony MacD. I believe you're just going up there to enjoy yourself. We bore you already."

"Sure. I'm bored stiff — at having to go."

"Could n't you send father a prepaid reply telegram to find out whether he's taken home the washing?"

"The washing would n't be worth the price of the telegram. Besides, I've got to find father first. He's probably in one of these fashionable British rendezvous — the booze joint."

"You'll come back soon, Tony MacD?"

The boy looked at her with his queer eyes, and the playful twist of the conversation seemed to desert him. He hung his head and said solemnly:

"I'll always be there when you want me, lady."

The departure of Tony was almost overlooked that evening, through the effect caused by the startling news which Rodney brought down with him. Since the demise of the Treves Settlement, the surplus energies of Rodney had been swept into the vortex of the woman's suffrage movement. He was always attending meetings and discussions, and going to breakfasts given to suffragettes released from jail. He talked at home about the activities of the various societies, and about their leaders and organizers. Among others he talked considerably about Ebba Janssen, a Swedish girl.

It would be idle to pretend that the rest of the family — in the midst of the absorbing episode of the arrival of Jenny — paid any detailed attention to this information, nor that it occurred to any of them that the name of Ebba Janssen stood for anything more than an automaton in connection with Rodney's new-found interests. But on this evening, according to a recognized Querrilian tradition affecting the imparting of important news, Rodney arrived home looking very flushed, got hold of Martin, and took him up to his room. And Martin came down a little later, and took Magda on one side. And Magda told Evelyn, and then the two girls broke the news to their mother that Rodney was engaged!

And then Mrs. Querrill went upstairs to Rodney alone, and kissed him and cried a little, and said:

“I hope you ’ll be happy, darling.”

And while she was upstairs, Martin broke the news to Mr. Querril, who said:

“God bless my soul! You don’t say so!”

He blew his nose, and added:

“Well, this is a surprise! I’d no idea. A Swedish girl! We must ask her down for the week end.”

When he saw Rodney, he shook his hand and spluttered:

"My dear boy, well, well! I'd no idea. I'd no idea at all!"

Then he asked rather plaintively:

"May we . . . are you asking her down?"

"Yes. I'm bringing her down on Saturday."

## II

On Saturday Ebba Janssen made her first appearance at Chessilton Heath. And the visit could not be described as a success. For the first time in the history of the family there appeared the germs of a cleavage. The mere suggestion that such a thing could happen was in itself sufficient to cause consternation.

Magda and Evelyn did their very best, but they could not like Ebba Janssen.

She was a tall girl, older than Rodney, with a round smooth face and rather colorless eyes. She had a certain dignity of carriage and pretty fair hair, but there was a hardness and austerity about her which the girls found disconcerting.

They kissed her effusively when she arrived, and she seemed rather surprised. She looked clever in a narrow way, but without humor or any broad feeling of sympathy. She was apparently fond of Rodney, over whom she had al-

ready acquired a kind of proprietary air, and she seemed to resent the fussy and endearing claims of the rest of the family to him.

She admired the garden, and the heath, and the baby, in the same staccato tones. She talked impassively about hygiene, and politics, the program of the Women's Party, the excellence of German municipal organization, the superiority of everything Swedish, the appalling condition of English slums, the ignorance and viciousness of the English lower classes, the way to cook food so as to extract the utmost nutriment out of it, the way to organize education in the interests of the State, the way to produce the moral citizen.

She frowned disapprovingly at Decimus, who came in during the afternoon, and was apparently so disgusted with his extravagant way of talking that she took Rodney's arm and strolled away to the other end of the garden.

"Is n't it awful!" said Evelyn to Magda, after she had gone. "She has no color!"

Poor Evelyn! She was all color, and she felt it very much. Magda could not deny that she was disappointed. She was not the sort of girl she had dreamed of for Rodney, but — Jenny was crying, she must go to her.

Mrs. Querril remarked dubiously:

"Oh, I don't know, my dear. I'm sure she's very sweet."

When Rodney had gone with her to the station, Mr. Querril rubbed his hands and exclaimed:

"Well, well . . . a very charming girl! Very charming indeed!"

Nobody answered him, and they all knew that he knew that they knew that he was lying.

Martin said nothing, but he went out and dug very viciously in the vegetable garden.

Decimus delivered a dissertation to Mr. Querril on the European situation:

"That Autocrat—Democracy! He is getting nearer and nearer. He wants to lay his hands on our babies, our bath towels, even our cabbages are not safe. They have got to be cooked in a certain way. I should never be surprised if, as a prelude, he doesn't plunge the whole of Europe into war. That will be simply like bursting in the front door. When he gets inside the house, his patent carpet-sweepers and disinfectants will be overpowering. The Teutons hate us because, although we never get up in the morning, we're always getting the early worm. And when we've got the early worm we never know what to do with it. The German



would convert it into quite an acceptable liver-sausage."

"Oh, rubbish! Decimus," laughed Mr. Querril. "You're always trotting out that old bogey of the German menace. The Germans are much too sensible. Too material, if you like. It would n't pay."

"None of these things are thought out on paper, Querril. No man, or even group of men, sit down and think them out. They're only the instruments of herd-instincts, and the underswell of humanity. And there is only one movement at the present day that is irresistible. That is the movement of democracy, which is another name for social evolution."

"Well, what has the German menace got to do with democracy?"

"Everything. If you had a sore on your body and it came to a head — excuse my disgusting metaphor, it's the only one that occurs to me — you would say to that sore, 'Get on or get out.' As I see it, the German sore is reaching a head. And underneath is the body of humanity that is fed up, absolutely fed up to the teeth, that is, in fact, rotten with sores. The majority of people are underpaid, underfed, and overworked, worried, and they mean to demand their pound of

flesh. This Prussian sore will burst from the inside. All these Zabern gentlemen will simply be used as a pick to break open the door of the house. They themselves will run down the steep place into the sea and be lost in the underswell."

Mr. Querril laughed, and dug his friend in the ribs.

"You're a disconcerting old pessimist," he said. "I must go and cut that hedge!"

### III

That same evening a tug delivered a bag of mail to H.M.S. *Alcibiades*. In it was a letter addressed to Lieut. J. Capel. That gentleman was at the moment playing deck-hockey. He broke away from the game at the sound of the bugle, expecting a letter from Magda — as he had not heard from her since the previous day. To his disappointment it was in a strange handwriting. He opened it, and perceived the signature of Tony MacDowell. And this is what Tony wrote:

*"My dear J. C.:*

"I have had a busy week on this detective stunt without much success. So far the Dago eludes me entirely. Mrs. Troon and I are as thick as thieves. I gave her a pound. I think I could have bought her body and soul for ten

cents. But she is a complete dud. I think she's on the square all right, but she knows nothing at all. It's the earlier part of Jim's life that might prove interesting. However, I got certain information out of her, and have established one curious fact. That is that for years Jim has been spending about thirty shillings or two pounds a week more than he earns! I figured it out this way. I found out from Mrs. Troon what he allows her, and what he buys and so on. Then I made a good friend of a Mr. Bennett at a sweet spot called 'The Cuttle Fish.' I followed Jim about for days and checked his drinks. I collaborated with friend Bennett over the matter, and he struck a fair average for his booze ticket. I next got together with a nobleman who oversees the stone-masons' yard where Jim works. He was not squeamish about informing me of Jim's weekly emolument. (He was n't exactly on the water wagon himself! They are a pretty bunch down this way!) Curse this English coinage! It fair drives me crazy! but I managed to arrive at the computation I have mentioned. I next tackled Jim himself. I told him I was from an attorney who had information that some money had been left Castro by an aunt in South Africa, and could he put me on to him. The only answer to this was a challenge to fight. I

did n't fancy getting mixed up in a scrap with an express train falling over an embankment, so I equivocated on this point. I managed to buy him off, but I couldn't get him to talk. Mrs. Troon says that if she mentions Castro he throws the furniture at her. He was certainly in a right and proper fury with me at the mention. Jim and Castro have evidently had a pretty useful quarrel.

"I next sought out Emma Troon. I found her at Grete's flat, as the detective who was last employed by the Querrils said she was. It was in the middle of the afternoon, and I regret to say the lady was lightly inebriated. She was drinking Kümmel when I got there and was absolutely at a loose end. I don't think she knew anything about Castro. Grete was away, and she seemed to me any man's plaything — apart from the drink. She was living the high life, and honestly I believe she's already forgotten all about Peter. He was only a stepping stone to more alluring episodes. I agree with you. She's a good nineteen. At her present rate she'll be ninety next year. I mean to hang on here and nose about. It drives me crazy to think that Peter should have been sacrificed to all this city front slush.

Yours sincerely,

"TONY MACD."

## IV

It was nearly a month later that John Capel, returning from manœuvres in the North Sea, found among his mail at Rosyth five telegrams. They were all from Tony MacDowell, and they were all couched in very similar language. They merely implied that Tony was on the track of something, that he very urgently wanted to see John, and that he was to be found at the Midland Hotel, Glasgow. Owing to certain mysterious reasons, all leave was stopped, or very much curtailed, to the navy. By exercising great circumlocution John managed to secure forty-eight hours. It is only a few hours' run to Glasgow, and he wired to Tony that he would be there that night.

He found the American boy pacing the vestibule of the hotel and looking anxious and drawn. John gripped his hand, and they retired to a secluded corner of the palm court. Without any unnecessary preamble Tony said:

"I've got him right here."

John's face lighted up with excitement.

"Good man!" he exclaimed. "Tell me all about it."

"I got hold of that fellow you put on to track Jim and Castro around London, and I pumped



him dry of anything he'd seen or heard. There was nothing doing really except the night when he overheard part of the quarrel, and Castro threatened to blab. The only little illuminating thing he heard apart from that, was a remark of Jim's when he said, 'All right, you can bloody well go back to Pannantoga!'

"It was a bit thin, but it was all I had to go on. I got busy at the shipping offices, trying to find out how a man would go to the ——— place. I'd never heard of it. I found out that it was an island somewhere in the Southern Pacific. There was no direct route. He might go to Australia for a start, or he might go through 'Frisco or Vancouver. I worried around Mill-wall for a couple of days, and then I got a kind of conviction he'd be more likely to go 'Frisco way. I went up to Liverpool and hung around the docks, and visited shipping offices, and got on every one's nerves. One evening, some guy in a saloon where I'd gone on the off-chance got talking to me, and I put my proposition to him. And he says, 'Why, if I wanted to go, I'd get aboard one of those Jessamine boats what sails from Glasgow to Iquique. And from there there's a dandy service of fruit boats with all the South Sea Islands.' I don't know how it was, but this suggestion got me. I felt that that was



the way Castro would go. Anyway, one gets cold feet sitting around. So I bundled along to Glasgow right away. I found there was a ship sailing for Iquique in three days' time. I hung about the docks there, and went up the Clyde and visited all the pubs in Greenock and Gourock, and then back to Glasgow. My God! What a place!

"I was in a fever of impatience to get a move on somewhere, and it all seemed like hunting for a scarf-pin you've dropped in the desert. On the night before the boat sailed for Iquique I visited a downtown music hall near the docks. I was feeling dead-beat. I just went there in the vague hope of seeing my man. I'd got him visualized to a hair from your friend's description and from Mrs. Troon's.

"I sat there watching the show. The same old stunts we get delivered across to us everywhere. Comedians, bicyclists, baritone-barmaids, and all the rest of it. And then a little Jap came on. His name was Yoshio Hiroshige. He was a wrestler. His manager came on and announced that they would pay a hundred pounds to any man that Hiroshige could n't throw in five minutes! Golly! it was rather amusing. I got interested in the damn thing. Four men came up, one after another — hefty

great dockhands and fighters. They hardly seemed to get their stance, before Yoshio had got a grip on them in some funny way and down they went. The house rocked with laughter. And I laughed myself. And then suddenly the laughter died on my lips. *Walking up the plank on to the stage and grinning like an organ-grinder was — my Dago, Castro!*

"I'd have sworn to him in a million. He'd got the weal on his left cheek, Mrs. Troon had told me about. He was the exact height and build, and he had the funny springy walk.

"He took his stance and every one laughed, expecting to see him go down like the rest. The Jap made his spring, but Castro seemed to draw himself in like a great ball. The Jap's clutch missed and Castro's arms shot out, and Yoshio only just missed being hugged himself. There was a gasp of surprise. Castro evidently knew something about the game. He grinned, and sidled like a great cat. Then he made a spring that Yosh countered but didn't enjoy. They broke away again. The referee announced that one minute was up. Everybody got excited. This was going to be some game. They squared up and made a simultaneous spring. There was a real dandy mix up, and they broke away again and the referee announced two minutes. Yosh

was getting a little anxious, you could see. He looked a nasty little customer, but Castro did n't look pleasant either. He was n't grinning, but he was snarling and saying insulting things — I should imagine — under his breath. Suddenly the Jap whipped in and got a lock around the Dago's knees, and brought him down. They rolled in a heap on the ground, and I thought our man was finished. But he did some funny business round the other's neck, like a dog shaking a rat. When eventually they fell apart again four minutes was up! Everybody was fair crazy with excitement, yelling mostly to the Dago to hold out. The thing got me, so I'd clean forgotten what I was there for. But suddenly I felt scared. I was looking at the Jap, and I noticed something about his eyes I did n't like. Castro had hurt him — I was sure of it. His little slits of eyes seemed to narrow to a knife edge, but, by God! they looked dangerous. I don't know how it was, but I felt it all coming. I felt like yelling out: 'Castro, get out of the ring, you bloody fool! He's going to kill you!' But my tongue seemed glued to the roof of my mouth. I could only gaze. I sat there like a half-baked clam and watched the whole thing happen as I knew it was going to. You could n't follow it in detail. It was a sudden whirlwind of flying arms and legs

and twisting bodies, and then suddenly — Bang! Down Castro went, like a brick falling off a building, with the Jap on top of him.

“I whipped round behind. Castro was lying unconscious. They took him away to the infirmary and I followed. I pretended I was a friend, and got to speak to the house surgeon. They examined him and said his back was broken.”

Tony's upper lip was twitching, and he dabbed the end of a cigarette in an ash-tray.

“And there he lay for five days unconscious. The doc says he may die any minute, or he may live for ten years. Yesterday he opened his eyes. He seems just conscious of what's going on, but no one can get him to talk. I got them to shunt him into a private ward, and this morning I tried to tackle him. I thought the best game would be to come straight to the point. I knew he was a vindictive case, and that he had quarreled with Jim. So I said, ‘Listen here, Mr. Castro, do you want that hundred pounds you nearly won the other night? If you do, it's yours if you 'll just give me a little information about Jim Troon.’

“He stared at me blankly, and up at the ceiling, and I repeated my request several times in diverse forms. At last he said, ‘We was ship-

mates.' He shut his eyes as though that clinched matters. But I was desperate. I was afraid he'd die, and perhaps he knew something and he might save the Querrils. I repeated the request, and offered to make it two hundred pounds. And then, by Golly! Do you know what he did? I was holding my head near to catch his answer, and he spat in my face, and closed his eyes again. . . . And that's how the case stands at present, John Capel."

## CHAPTER XV

### AN ISLAND STORY

#### I

**A**T the end of July, Mrs. Querril came to her island. It was not an undiscovered island in a land of dreams. It belonged as a matter of fact to a cigar-merchant, and it was at the mouth of a Cornish river. It was a diminutive affair, less than a quarter of a mile long, and not more than a hundred yards wide at its widest. It consisted principally of a large modern castellated house built on rock, three cottages, a beach, and a strip of land covered with coarse grass and shrubs. The biggest thing about it was the rent demanded by the cigar-merchant for the month of August. The payment was only justified by some one desperately in need of being cut off from the world, and it seemed too alluring an attraction to the Querrils to resist if it could be managed at all.

Eventually a happy arrangement was come to, by which Mr. Lemaire, Mr. Querril, and Decimus



shared the expenses each according to their family and requirements. It was an ugly house, but commodious and very attractive in fine weather.

If Peter had been there it would have been the nearest thing to Mrs. Querril's island dream that she could reasonably expect to attain. Even without Peter, it presented her with many hours of distraction and happiness. Of course there was no chance of John coming, but Magda and the baby were of the party, and all the Lemaires, including Cecil the schoolboy, and Decimus, and there were several spare bedrooms, even then, in case they were needed. The party spent most of the day bathing, eating, sailing, or sitting on the terrace out of the wind, reading and talking. Occasionally they sailed or rowed across to Angterroc — rather less than a mile — which was their base of supplies, and their point of communication with the outside world. Nothing had been heard of Tony MacDowell since he departed for "that crazy little hamlet of London." The family were quite concerned about him, and he had been written to twice and invited to the island, but no answer had been received.

"Perhaps he has gone back to the States," suggested Mr. Querril.

"He would never have gone without letting us know," replied Magda.

"Do you know anything about his people?" asked Mr. Lemaire.

"I do," said Magda. "He has a married brother much older than himself. He's an engineer at Buffalo. And he has an old mother in Michigan. You have to be a very special pal of Tony's to get him to tell you about his mother. He has a little locket with her portrait, which he always wears concealed inside his waistcoat."

"H'm!" grunted Mr. Querril. "They're very sentimental — the Americans — very sentimental! Charming people but — sentimental!"

Ebba Janssen — who was spending a week with the family of her fiancé — looked up with a queer little smile.

"Yes," she said very slowly. "It is true. So different to — the English!"

And nobody had any idea whether she meant it or not.

Mrs. Querril, who was busy on a garment for Jenny, thought to herself:

"Dear me, I do hope Rodney will be happy with that girl. She has such funny green eyes. I really can't get fond of foreigners. I do wish he had chosen a nice simple English girl, some one like Annette or Joan. No, not Annette, of

course. Annette is promised to my Peter. As I always say to him, 'Everything will all be the same, darling.' It must be nearly dinner-time. I get quite hungry in this place."

## II

They were sitting on the terrace at the time. It had been a glorious day and the sun was going down. Decimus was enjoying himself. The embryo of a new book (in the Wedgwood Series) was bubbling in his mind. It was to be called "The Decameron of the Island." Ten people — instead of escaping from a plague are escaping from a passion — come to the island, and every night they tell their story in turn and — well, of course, the stories all prove to be delightfully interdependent. Try as it may to do otherwise, an island cannot escape romance. The sea has made a frame for the little canvas. And anything which is depicted on it must be a reflection of its own movement.

"Things are bound to happen on an island. They can't escape," thought Decimus, little dreaming of the things which were at that moment preparing to happen on that particular island. Every one had gone in to change for dinner except Decimus and Mr. and Mrs. Querril.

Decimus was gazing idly at the sea. A dinghy about half way from the mainland was slopping along languidly in the direction of the island. Small boats often cruised about these waters, and occasionally came right up to the shore and read the dilapidated notice-board which said: "Visitors are not allowed to land on the island. Private property." Sometimes this notice was respected and sometimes ignored. In this particular case the boat appeared to be making a very business-like course for the little beach on the south side of the house, where the most successful landings were made.

Decimus remarked:

"Looks as though we're going to have a visitor."

Mr. Querril was always amusing himself with a telescope. He turned it on the dinghy and replied:

"Oh, I don't expect they're coming here. There are three people on board. . . . It may possibly be some of the stuff from the stores. Radkin's, over at Angterroc, said he'd try and send it if it came to-day."

The little boat became invisible, owing to the elevation from which they were looking. In a few minutes' time, however, Evelyn came out and said:

"There's some one landing on the beach. I saw them from my bedroom. It's a man with two boatmen."

She walked to the end of the terrace. There was a winding stone staircase that had been cut from the extreme edge down to the beach. Any one coming up was not visible till he reached the last few steps. Evelyn loitered by the entrance, and suddenly she almost screamed:

"Why, it's Tony!"

The others were gradually collecting for dinner. The news was shouted all over the house.

"It's Tony! Tony has turned up!"

The boys ran to their windows which overlooked the terrace and cheered. Magda ran out through the French windows of the drawing-room. Both Mr. and Mrs. Querril got up and walked towards the hero of this excitement.

Tony MacDowell walked slowly up the last few steps of the stairway and on to the terrace. He staggered along and held out his hand. His face looked grayer than usual, and dark rings encircled his eyes. He looked like a man dead beat to the world. He groped his way towards Mrs. Querril and made a brave attempt to smile. The group surrounded him with cries of greeting, and exclamations of surprise. Then they seemed to all stop suddenly. There was something queer



about Tony. He looked ill. Something had happened. He held Mrs. Querril's hand and seemed to experience a difficulty in getting his speech. At last he said:

"I've brought along some big news for you."

They all leaned eagerly forward, but no one attempted to question him.

"Peter's going to be released," he said.

There was an almost inaudible gasp of joy, and every one instinctively turned to Mrs. Querril as though recognizing that this was *her* show. But the mother of Peter merely lowered her spectacles and looked above them at the messenger. Then tears started to her eyes, and her tongue seemed to be moving noiselessly between her lips.

"They've found out," Tony went on, "that the girl Emma Troon died years ago. This girl . . . is not Emma Troon. Her real name is Clara Castellani. She was nearly nineteen at the time Peter . . . Gee! I'm afraid I feel a bit queer, I . . ."

### III

It was Martin who caught Tony. Several of them carried him in and put him down on a bed upstairs. An emergency bottle of brandy was produced, and Mrs. Yardley got busy with her array of hot-water bottles. But Tony was very



shaky. He recovered his consciousness in a very few minutes, but he lay there sleepily exhausted, like a man who had done everything possible in a cause and is indifferent to the result. It was decided not to question him further. The news he had brought was sufficient unto itself. It was all-important, tremendous! Peter was to be released! Peter was innocent! Peter would come to the island! Everything would be as usual!

Annette ran round the terrace. She felt she must run. She ran down the pathway at the back of the house, where she was joined by both the dogs. They found it somewhat dull on the island with nothing to do but to bark at sea-gulls — and when she exclaimed:

“Potash darling, Peter is free! My Peter is free and innocent! Oh, Perlmutter, Peter is coming back!”

Both dogs barked with delight, and scampered at her heels. It was apparently the most ecstatic news they had heard for many a day. The three of them did a round of the island in a world's record time, making a noise that could surely be heard on the mainland a mile away. When Annette regained the house, she dashed upstairs.

The only person she could see on the landing was Ebba, who had just come out of her room.

"Ebba, Ebba," cried Annette. "Peter is free! Peter is going to be released!"

Ebba adjusted some little ornament at her throat, and turned to the long mirror on the staircase.

"Really," she said. "That's excellent! I'm very glad."

Annette dashed away and into the room she shared with Joan. Joan was standing there looking flushed and pleased. Annette flung her arms round her and kissed her. Then she threw herself on the bed, and making strange noises that were a mixture of growls, groans and joy, she proceeded to bite the pillow.

"Whatever *are* you doing, darling?" said Joan.

"Oh, God!" growled Annette. "How I hate that Swedish woman!"

#### IV

The family were dying for more news, but nobody would think of disturbing Tony. He had been given a light meal and put to bed. According to a rule of the island, every one was to go to bed at ten o'clock. This rule was strictly adhered to by every one except Mr. Querril who usually turned in at half past, and Decimus — who incidentally had proposed the rule and sug-

gested a scheme of penalties for infringement — and he usually went to bed about twelve. On this occasion it was nearer one in the morning that Decimus crept upstairs. His mind had been much occupied and he had not noticed the time. “The Decameron of the Island” was being furnished with living episodes. “Things are bound to happen on an island. They can’t escape.”

Decimus got quietly into bed and turned out the light. He lay there ruminating for nearly half an hour, when he was suddenly startled by a gentle tap on the door. He sat up in bed and heard his door open quietly.

“Who is that?” he called out.

A voice answered:

“Are you awake, Dess? I’m just crazy for a talk and a smoke!”

“Tony! You ought not to be talking and smoking, you ought to be asleep!”

“Aw! I’m all right. I was just a bit jagged. It was more the emotional strain of getting here than anything I’d been through.”

He shut the door, and Decimus lighted a candle. There was no electric light on the island, which is only right and proper. Tony pulled a paper packet of cigarettes out of his dressing-gown pocket, and lighted one from the candle.

"I'm getting a real live-wire at this detective business," he said. "I did n't know your room. So I tracked round till I came across a pair of fairy-like footgear, then I took a chance. It's a real good institution, this British institution of hanging out your boots. It's like nailing your colors to the mast. When I go along the corridor of a hotel and see outside a door a large pair of man's boots and next to it a dainty pair of girl's boots, I always get a peculiar kind of thrill. I feel I want to tap on the door and call out: 'Say, are you comfy?'"

Decimus was also "crazy for a talk," but his conscience smote him that he ought not to encourage Tony to talk. The boy was played out. He ought to be in bed. In any case he would ask no questions. If he insisted on talking, then he must. It was a great temptation to listen. Why was he so played out? What experiences had he been through?

Tony ensconced himself comfortably in an upholstered cane chair, and puffed his cigarette. Decimus watched him, and noted the twitching of his sallow face, and the movement of his restless eyes as he blinked at the candle. Suddenly he said:

"I'm scared about Peter. I saw him in prison. Gosh! he is sick. I could n't tell them.

It's fair broke him up. He's been in the infirmary three weeks. There's a dog's chance that if they can get him out quick his life may be saved. Two years of it would have killed him sure. He hardly knew me. He doesn't realize that he may come out soon."

Tony buried his head in his hands. Decimus was not sure that he was not sobbing. He was silent for some moments. The steady beat of the sea against the rocks below sounded like the distant roar of ironic cheers at some cruel fate. The voice of Tony changed. It was colored with passion and anger.

"Oh, it's cruel!" he said. "This prison system is barbaric! It's damned . . . cruel. It leaves out everything we've fought for. If a man has done wrong, you ought to help him, not break him. Why this better distinction between physical and spiritual things? If a man gets appendicitis you remove his appendix and nurse him up; you don't kick him in the stomach."

He leaned back and surveyed his cigarette which had gone out. He relighted it, and continued:

"But there's awful big things on the move. Dess. . . . If you want to get on in the world, it's a great scheme to adopt an attitude of utter helplessness. Go about like an infant. Some

one is dead sure to come along, and help you through. These Querrils! How can you help it? They tickle me to death! I love them. They're hothouse products. They know there will always be gardeners to keep the place at the right temperature for them. They are like Ptolemy the Second, who gambles on his beauty. This young Capel! He's a proper man! My! I wish you'd seen the way he handled friend Castro!"

## V

Decimus rolled on his bed, and reached for his own cigarette case. He was elaborately nonchalant.

"You saw Castro then? If you won't offer me one of your cigarettes, I must smoke my own!"

"Sorry. Yep, I saw friend Castro. He would have no truck with any one till the other sailor-man came along. By God! I could n't help admiring the man. His back was broken, but he spat in my face because I asked him to betray a man he hated. And his reason was sufficient. They were shipmates. What is this bond of the sea? You never hear a man speak of his landmate. The land seems to have no



honor or *esprit de corps*. It staggers you when you come up against it.

"And there was Castro lying there like a dead man, spitting out his hate at the world. And then the other man comes along and leans over and talks to him. He does n't seem to hear him for a long time. He just bogles at the ceiling. And then he gradually seems to be conscious of something, some tang of the great salt open spaces. He blinks and turns his eyes to the other fellow. And Capel never asks him to betray his shipmate, but he talks about rivers in Borneo, and about old fruit steamers plying the waters of the Malay Archipelago, and serangs, and quartermasters, and cargo-chains and winches. And gradually the other joins in. He becomes interested. He calls him 'tuan.' They seem to get lost in the mists of the Southern Seas. You can smell the damn place. At last they reach the island of Pannantonga. . . ."

Tony pulled his dressing-gown round him more tightly. In spite of the warmth of the night he seemed chilly. Decimus offered his eiderdown, which he was n't using, but the boy shook his head.

"What was I saying? Oh, yes, sure, Pannantonga. It seemed that at that time Castro and Jim Troon were shipmates on a freight-steamer

plying between Monte Video and some of the South Sea islands. Every spring they touched Pannantonga. It sounded a fairy-like-enough location, covered with flowers and cocoanuts, with coral-reefs all around. There was a long white bungalow on the south side of the island — a dandy place, like a Long Island summer resort — and here there lived an Italian woman named Fiametta Castellani. She was the kept woman of one of these Malay rajahs. He was a very wealthy man, with big interests all over the South Seas. He used to spend about two months a year with her. The rest of the time he was away collecting the stuff and getting a move on his different propositions. And then of course the old Adam and Eve triple-bill was staged. The lady got fed up with these long intervals of nothing but reading novels and thrashing the servants. And then there came to the island a most unlikely source of trouble in the person of a Scotch accountant, a raw-boned, sandy galoot named Morson. He was sent there by the Rajah for a month every year to check his dealings. He sounded like a frozen guinea, but he seemed to get right there in the ladies' affections, without any 'deeficulty.' He was the only man Fiametta ever got crazy over.

"It's a very ordinary, sordid story, Decimus. It will make you blush. Not on account of the immorality, but on account of the triteness of it. Fiametta had a baby, a dusky-eyed little effort for which the Rajah was right and properly responsible. He was as pleased as a man who has lost a ten-cent piece, and found a five-dollar bill. He left a few days after the baby was born, intending to return in a month or two. But at Singapore he contracted fever and was very ill for a long spell. When he recovered his affairs had got tied up, and he had to go to Europe on a big litigation case. He was away altogether for fifteen months. Fourteen months after he'd been away, Fiametta had another baby. This would not have pleased papa so much. In fact he would have been dashed annoyed. And he had a certain peculiarly efficient and Eastern way of dealing with trouble of that sort. You see he was absolute lord of the island. He carried revolvers around with him, and all that sort of thing. Fiametta was his bondwoman and — well, they don't ask lots of questions down in those parts. Fiametta was in a panic. She went up to a bungalow in the hill, alone with an old Italian woman and a native servant. And there she had the baby, so

that no one else on the island should hear about it, and also because when it was born she meant to dispose of it.

"But when the time came she lost her nerve. No woman can kill her own baby unless she is actually 'temporarily insane.' And Fiametta was n't. When she saw it, she cried, and wanted to keep it, along with the dusky. She was mad on it. She must have had a pretty bad time of it up there in that bungalow in the wood, with no one to have a heart-to-heart with except the Italian servant, Luisa. But one day, while the matter was still *in lege pendente* — as the lawyers say — Luisa spotted that the coasting steamer *Peter Gurney* had come into the bay.

"Of course I'm piecing this all together best way I can from what Castro said, Dess. A lot of it is very vague. The two women must have figured it out together. Anyway Luisa went down and loped around the jetty. The first person she struck the trail of was Jim Troon.

"There's a bit of a blank here. Whether she put her proposition to Jim right there or whether she induced him to come up to the Castellani woman, I don't know. But the result was a square deal. And Castro, who was at that time second mate, had to be let into the secret. The baby was smuggled out at night on to the steamer,

and shoved into Castro's cabin. A big sum of money was paid down, and the Castellani promised to pay a hundred pounds a year to Jim Troon's wife to look after the baby until such time as she should ask for it. Every year Jim or his wife was to take the child and exhibit it to an agent in the city of London, and they would receive a draft which would enable them to draw two pounds a week.

"It's a mystery to me how Jim and Castro managed about the baby on the voyage. Whether they pretended it was a stowaway and offered to adopt it, or whether the skipper had a wife aboard and they got round them both, Lord only knows!

"It was nearly a year before they got back to London, and they managed to get Clara Castellani there safe and well. Jim had been married a few months before he sailed, but his wife had so far not presented him with offspring. But ten months after he returned she had a child when they were living in Stockwell, which they called Emma. Soon after they went to live at Chatham, where Jim settled down and worked in the docks, and drew his hundred pounds a year for the Castellani child. I gather about that time he was running pretty straight. He was passionately fond of his wife, who was also half-



Italian — her name was Maria Ferrati — and they did the square thing by the other woman's kid, as you might imagine they would. And then six months later poor Jim fairly got it in the neck. There was an epidemic of typhoid in the quarter of Chatham where they lived. The whole family got it. They were very sick. Jim got over it, and the Castellani child got over it, but his wife and Emma both died."

"Good God!" interjected Decimus. "Then this girl is not Emma Troon."

"This girl is Clara Castellani. I have seen Emma Troon's grave in a pauper cemetery at Chatham myself."

"But what on earth did Troon —"

"Troon nearly went dotty when he realized the blow he had received. He went out after raw spirit. He bludgeoned himself into insensibility with the poison. But he was cute enough to hang on to the Castellani child all through. He took her to London, and engaged odds and ends of women to look after her. He got sick of explaining to all these people who the child was, so he eventually just called her Emma, after his own child. But when he took her down town to the attorney once a year she was then Clara Castellani. And he got the stuff all right. And every year for eighteen years that woman 'way



over in Pannantonga had salved her conscience over the momentary lapse with a raw-boned Scotsman to the tune of one hundred pounds. Jim apparently soon tired of this wet-nurse scheme, for four years later he married a woman out of a dry-goods store, and that's the present Mrs. Troon. I reckon he married her more as a nurse to the child than as a companion to himself. She seemed to fill no kink in his heart. He never stopped drinking from the day of the first Mrs. Troon's death. He never told his wife who Clara Castellani is. She still thinks she's the child of his first wife.

"Now comes the crux of the situation. Last year the money suddenly stopped. The attorney said that the Castellani woman was dead, but Jim did n't believe him. It synchronized with a moment when Castro again turned up in London. The men were both hard up, as usual. Troon was furious with the Querrils over some imaginary grievance. He and Castro got together. And then — I gather this scheme — this blackmailing, dirty plot was evolved by the two of them."

"It's what you call 'the honor of the sea,'" remarked Decimus.

"That's one of the side miracles — that men, who could be loyal to each other, could put across

anything as diabolically vile. For the whole thing was done in a cold-blooded, commercial way. They spotted that these Querrils were — amateurs. They put Emma — I mean Clara — on to it. She was partly innocent and partly guilty. Anyway she was young, but not so young as they represented. They drove her into it very neatly. In the end she scored off them by disappearing.”

Tony stopped and his head drooped on to his chest. Decimus was not watching him. He was turning it all over in his mind.

“There are lots of points I’d like to ask you about,” he said at length.

“Yes, I know, but not to-night. I’m through.” Tony stood up and staggered towards the window. He hovered there for a moment like a great ghost, then he added:

“Besides it’s all going to seem trivial now.”

Decimus waited for further enlightenment, and none being forthcoming, he remarked:

“What do you mean by ‘it’s all going to seem trivial now’?”

Tony turned to him as though somewhat surprised.

“Have n’t you been reading the news-sheets?”

“Curiously enough Querril forgot to order the papers, and we can never get them over at

Angterroc. In fact it's rather nice to get away from all the hot air of Fleet Street for a bit. We've enjoyed it. We have n't seen a paper for five days. Has anything been happening?"

Tony hesitated by the door. He seemed anxious to frame his parting news in an effective manner. He walked across the room again and blew out the candle.

"I'm sorry I'm disturbing like this," he said. "Little boys ought to have gone by-by long since. I tell you they're wonderful — these Querrils. Folks are bound to be always looking after them. And it's quite right they should. They're the darlings of the gods. I just love them, the whole atmosphere of them. We've got to preserve them somehow. John has done his service. You can always depend on some one like John turning up to defend them, although they would never quite understand him, never quite appreciate him. And now John has gone off to help see them through again."

"Where's he gone?"

"This island fleet has been mobilized. John's away seeking his lawful occasions. In a few days' time the whole of Europe will be at war."

It was Tony's *ultima thule*. He whispered, "Good night, Dess," and disappeared silently through the door.

Decimus lay there some time, watching the dark corner of the room where Tony had vanished. He seemed to be doubting whether the door had ever opened and shut, whether indeed the visit of his friend had not been a chimera, an island night's dream. Then he rose heavily and puffed his way to the window.

The night was calm and extraordinarily placid. There was no moon, but the profundity of the heavens was disclosed by the stars in an almost incredible scheme of gradations — Some bold and interrogative, others idle and detached; while here and there a pale swarm would melt into nothingness, as though they were leaving it all; floating away like the hejira of a flock of acolytes dismissed from their job by the high priest for some lack of punctilio in the impressive ceremonial.

"It's wonderfully balanced," thought Decimus suddenly.

All around was the mysterious movement of water. Beneath him a dark rock stood out like some cowed Æsculapius listening to the pulse of the sea.

Away in the distance lights flickered hither and thither, like furtive eyes suspicious of this immensity of repose.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE IDEALIST VERSUS THE PHILOSOPHER

#### I

PETER spent five months in a nursing home in London. For part of that time he hovered between life and death. At one time it was doubtful whether he would in any case retain his reason. That he would be an invalid for several years was a foregone conclusion. The prison experience had shattered his nerves, affected his heart, and seriously disorganized his digestive apparatus. He was to all intents and purposes a physical wreck.

It was not till the following February that he was well enough to be removed in a motor ambulance to Chessilton Heath—"the chunk of a growing boy," who had raced off one morning to catch his train to London, returned, looking like a wizened old gentleman. He had suffered from jaundice, and his skin was wrinkled and yellow. He started at the slightest noise. He hardly ever spoke or smiled. He lay all day staring at



the ceiling, as though he did n't recognize where he was, or that it did n't interest him. The family in turns came and sat by his bed, and tried to amuse him. He seemed to take an inordinately long time to take anything in, and when he did he merely nodded or frowned. It did n't seem to matter. Some of them read to him, and he would listen abstractedly for a few minutes, and then fall asleep, or be obviously distressed.

He developed unaccountable likes and dislikes to people, and an almost savage fastidiousness concerning food. If it was n't exactly as he fancied it, he would thrust it from him like a spoiled child. His mother worried him, and the boys left him quite apathetic. He would sometimes like to have Magda, and he would clutch her hand and fumble with it like a drowning man. Once they brought the baby, and held it up to him. He looked at it solemnly for half a minute, and then suddenly burst into tears and turned on his side. He did not appear to recognize either Tony or Decimus. The only person with whom he seemed entirely comfortable was his nurse, a middle-aged, competent person from Lancashire named Morson. She treated him kindly, but with unrelenting firmness. She would say:

"Oh, no, Master Peter; we won't have any of



that. Fish! Very nice fish, very good for little boy. Fish very good for the brain — make master a very clever big man. Now coom on, laddy!"

And Peter seemed to recognize in her the arbitrary embodiment of some autocratic power that might possibly get him out of all this mess. He grumbled and protested, but he always did as she told him in the long run.

When Annette came to see him, he appeared startled, as though she had suddenly touched some chord of revelation within himself. He looked at her very hard. She leaned over him and said:

"Peter, you know me. You know me, don't you, Peter? . . . Annette!"

He looked from her face to the window, as though he were trying to recall some pleasant experience, which for the moment eluded him. She kissed him on the brow, and he put up his hands, and fondled her hair.

Annette smiled, and chatted on in her musical voice:

"Peter, do you remember when you lost your cap in the rabbit holes upon Folly's Head? And when we picnicked over in the woods at Moblehurst and you made up the story about Gobbo the white rhinoceros and Ug the giraffe. And

it came on to rain, Peter, and we took cover in a sand-pit, and there we met the funny old man who showed us tricks with string, and said he had been a quartermaster on a sloop which had sunk pirate Chinese dhows. And how excited you were! and you wanted to go to sea; and you practised harpooning on the lawn, and smashed a tomato frame. Peter, Peter dear, do you remember the old lady in the cottage at Tidehurst, who told us how 'profligate' her potatoes had been? . . ."

Peter looked at her, vaguely entertained. He still played with her hair. And then suddenly he said in a faint voice:

"There was a zigzag path down to the shore. You . . ."

"Yes? Yes, Peter, yes?"

Annette painfully strived to think of the particular experience he was trying to recall, but she could not. After a moment or two, he sighed and turned away.

## II

It would be unfair to the Querril family to imagine that the serious condition of Peter absorbed the whole family attention during that trying period, or that they were in any way

indifferent to "the bigger issue" which was then engulfing the world. The war, in fact, led to most unusual Querrilian celebrations. At times in discussing it, the family were as near to quarreling as they had ever been in their lives. It was a matter that if thought about at all had to be thought about intensely.

Decimus always retained one very definite little vision of an island episode.

It was the night the news came. They were all on the terrace. Rodney and Magda had just landed from the boat. They were armed with newspapers, and were looking very white and solemn. Martin had called out:

"Is it true?"

And Magda had nodded her head, and replied:

"Yes, Sir Edward Grey has made a disgusting, patriotic speech. They're at war. . . ."

And Decimus became extremely occupied with this new aspect of Querrilism, which adjudged patriotism "disgusting." It was not an opinion in any way influenced by the obvious danger in which John was immediately plunged. It was something much deeper and more final than that. It was an expression of revolt of the finer sensibilities against the course fiber of the body politic. During the whole of their lives they had never given the question of war ten minutes'

consideration. War was not merely a crime, it was an unspeakable, unthinkable crime. And patriotism, with its narrow partizanship, and unaltruistic outlook, was — disgusting! Everything that had been striven for and established was thrown into a melting pot. Conscience was outraged. These old gentlemen, who held the lives of every one in their hands, ought to have avoided it. The matter was not agreeable.

It may be said that that was the first conclusion arrived at by the whole of the Querril family. And it was a conclusion fanned to a white heat by the hygienist, Ebba Janssen.

Ebba Janssen for the first time showed real animation and enthusiasm. She talked till late that night about "the capitalist war."

### III

This universal, outraged sense lasted many months. Mr. Querril would sometimes say:

"Dear me, they ought not to have invaded Belgium!" or, "This seems very shocking, a passenger ship torpedoed!"

But the protest was said rather in sorrow than in anger. It was an impeachment of times rather than of individuals. It could never have happened if Mr. Gladstone had been alive, or even

King Edward. It was a very long time before the Querril family would begin to realize that the war was in any way an affair which concerned themselves directly. It certainly concerned John, but John was an exceptional person, a professional naval man. If John thought it was all right to go about killing people for some vague principle, then, as far as he was concerned, it *was* all right. And the point must be loyally conceded for the sake of Magda.

Curiously enough the most doubtful member was Rodney. He adhered to the Querril point of view, generally speaking, but he appeared to be weighing the whole thing in his mind, and he would sometimes advance theories that sounded almost imperialist.

Mr. Lemaire was also hot on the popular side, and Annette frequently argued that "as things were, we were bound to come in." There were so many other of their friends who held this view that gradually it became understood that discussion of the war was taboo.

To Decimus the question was fraught with such amazingly discursive possibilities that no one could determine what he thought. With a pacifist he would take up the attitude of a rabid imperialist; with a red-hot patriot he would argue by the hour as a pacifist.



Peter had never heard of the war. It began when he was practically out of his mind in the prison infirmary, and he was still too unwell to read the newspapers. And of course it was agreed that nothing should be said to him about it.

In the spring he was brought downstairs, and the library was converted into his bedroom. On fine days Nurse Morson would wheel him out onto the brick path of the pergola and leave him there in the sun.

And there he was on a certain day in May when Rodney was married to Ebba.

There were certain disappointments about this wedding. In the first place Ebba refused to be married in a church. She said that as neither of them believed in the church service it would be a profanity to go through it. She also said that she did not consider that the feelings of one's relatives ought to influence one's sense of duty. Conscience was above everything, so they went to the registrar's office. In the second place she refused to cry.

But the third and greatest disappointment — certainly to Mrs. Querril — was that the young couple were not to live at Chessilton Heath. It appeared that Ebba required a quicker train service, in order to be in closer touch with her



multifarious activities, so they went to live at Clotton-Diddlesbury, about half way up the line, where there were good trains that got to London in half an hour. After the wedding, and when the few guests had departed, Peter, who was just going to be wheeled in, suddenly said to Evelyn:

"Where was John?"

"John! Oh, he could n't get leave, darling."

Peter said nothing more, but he seemed to be considering the matter profoundly.

The next morning he asked for John again. Evelyn again reminded him of what she had said. In the afternoon he said to Magda:

"It's a long time since John had leave, Magda."

Magda concealed her surprise at the remark.

"No, darling, only a month or two ago. I think he's on manœuvres or something."

Poor Magda! How she wished she were speaking the truth!

A few days later he said to Nurse Morson:

"Nurse, find out for me where John Capel is."

"Aye now, laddy, don't you worry yourself. Mr. Capel's all right."

He looked at her suspiciously. John was becoming an obsession. With the cunning of an invalid he began to try and trip people up over the question of John. He suspected that some-

thing was being kept from him. In a most unaccountable fashion the quest of John seemed to vitalize him. It was the first matter he had developed an interest in since he was a free man. He seemed to think it was in some way tremendously important. A slight tinge of color came to his cheeks, his eyes became brighter. Nearly every day he said:

"Has nothing been heard of John to-day?"

"This John is doing the boy a power of good," said the nurse one day to Mrs. Querril.

Several specialists and pathologists had visited Peter and recommended various forms of treatment, but no one seemed to do him so much good as this elusive lieutenant whose address even to his own wife was never more informing than "Somewhere at sea."

#### IV

With increasing vitality the truth could not be kept from him for long. One day he asked for a newspaper. The request was received with mingled delight and regret. Peter was beginning to take an interest in his fellow men. Alas! for his first glimpse at his fellow man's recent activities! Nurse Morson equivocated. She would get the newspaper later on. She con-

sulted the family. It was eventually decided that it would be better for some one to tell him about the war, before he was brought face to face with all its complicated and distressing details in the daily press. It was a Friday, and Magda remembered that Tony was coming down the next day for the week-end. Who could be better at breaking the news cunningly and felicitously than he? And this was Tony's felicitous method as he imparted the information to Peter in a sunny corner of the lawn:

"Say, sonny, while you've been playing the sick man, there's been a real good rumpus all over this gay little earth. The big powers have picked up sides, and they're not all in the game yet. They're having a real good time. This little old island, France, and Russia top the bill this side, and Germany and Austria are star performers over yonder. And they've all got their fans out in the Balkans, trying to beat up some fresh keen ball-players. The United States has not yet taken a hand in it, but Tony MacD. is trying for all he's worth to wangle a passport to New York, and if ever he gets to Washington the President and all that push will have to show him a pretty cute reason why God's country is not living up to its story. We all have a story. It's what we've come through, what we are,

what we represent. And we have to go on with it, or close the book forever."

Peter never took his eyes from the cherry blossom in full flower against the house. At this point he said:

"Why are they at war?"

Tony did not hesitate with his answer.

"Because the story has reached that point where the war comes in. In a hundred years' time some genius will sift the causes which brought it about; and no one will bother to read him, because they will have their own troubles then. But I could put him wise now. It's come through greed, vanity, selfishness, ignorance, intolerance, love, honor, and fear. In fact all the ingredients of a real good story. But mostly love and fear. We all want things for those we love, and we're fearful for those we love. A nest like this . . . if you thought there was a gang of thieves and galoots up on Folly's Head whose big idea was to raid this place and carry off your women-folk — what would you do? You'd employ the instruments of fear. If you were going bankrupt, and the place was to be sold off, and you saw a chance to do a big deal, and make it safe again, so as your women-folk should go softly and wear their glad-rags again — would n't you do it? And if you make money some one

gets pushed back a bit. It's all in the story. And the motif of the story — the only motif of any story. — is love.

"Fear is only an accessory after the fact. And, sir, it's not this gauzy, universal brotherhood-of-man, grape-juice and potash brand of love that counts. It's the intense, individual love. The eyes of some woman, the touch of her hand, the lingering, compelling essence of her, that hallows her children and yours. It's that that links you to life. It's that that makes you do things, fool around, and go to war because you're frightened. It's your story, and the story of the gay little earth."

## V

Tony wangled his passport. He told Mrs. Querril he was going to see his old mother in Michigan. But to Magda he had quite a different reason for going. He said:

"The fact is, I want a good eat. An American who has been abroad some time gets a sort of nostalgia for green corn on the cob."

"You sensualist! You could get some sent over."

"It's not the same. Besides, there's all sorts of other good things, and the cooking!"

"I'm sure Mrs. Yardley is a very good cook."



"She's not bad for an English cook, but my! I crave for a chicken à la Maryland in the way our old colored woman used to fry it. And oysters! I wake up in the night and think of the fried oysters she used to give us, Blue-points as big as a plate!"

"Oh, Tony MacD. I'd no idea you were like this. We would never have asked you down."

"And the breakfast! Breakfast is a dead meal this side. You don't begin to understand cereals. And these boiled eggs in a little hour-glass, gosh! The cooking of hen-fruit is an art in itself. And where is the grape-fruit of my youth? and the steaming plates of buckwheat cake, and dear, gold maple syrup?"

"Do you have all this for breakfast?"

"We diaper it all round our central edifice, which is usually a grilled chop, and a dish of fried potatoes."

"You horror! No wonder you are miserable here. We must have simply starved you."

"Yes, I'm just starved," sighed Tony, not taking his eyes from the fine curves of Magda's cheek and neck, as she bent over the baby.

And so he went back to America, and ate green corn on the cob, and saw his old mother in Michigan, and ultimately persuaded the United States to come into the war.



## VI

When Tony had gone, Peter was allowed to have the newspapers. At first they simply bewildered him. He read a little, and then frowned and pushed the paper away.

He said nothing, but for days he was so obviously troubled that the nurse persuaded him to forego reading. She read little bits out to him instead.

At the end of the next week he asked for the paper again. He became so insistent that they thought he would be probably unhappier still without it. This time he sighed and seemed determined to go into the matter more exhaustively. He read for a long time and afterwards was more tranquil.

As the weeks went by he became more avid for news. He not only read the daily papers, but demanded the weeklies and the quarterlies. As his interest increased, his vitality renewed itself in like ratio. Before the end of the month he was walking by easy stages about the garden and a little way down the road. He became a voracious reader. He read everything he could get hold of, including novels and books on various aspect of the war. They brought him his sketch book and pencil, but the passion for drawing

seemed dormant. He wanted to read and he could n't read enough.

And then one day there was a great excitement. John turned up. He had three days' leave, the first since that fateful August. He looked remarkably well, keener and more alert than ever, in spite of the fact that the hair on his temples was beginning to turn gray, and the crow's feet around his eyes were more pronounced. He was in tremendously high spirits, but not a word could be got out of him about the war or about his own activities. He wanted to laugh and sing and rag, and throw the baby up in the air, and brazenly hug his wife before every one, and jump the tennis net — the others still occasionally played — and run Peter down to the heath and back in his wheeled chair. His visit came and went in a flash. It was like a tonic to a jaded body. It left behind it the aftermath of cheerfulness and hope, only marred by that haunting but bravely controlled look at the back of Magda's eyes.

It contrasted strangely with the visit of Rodney and Ebba, the following week-end. They had now been married nearly three months, and there was that curious telepathic conviction throughout the family — mutually recognized but not expressed — that Rodney was already

not happy. Rodney, the idealist, the Querril of Querrils, had made a mistake. And if he had made a mistake, if he had married the wrong woman, everything that constituted a Querril ideal was scattered to the winds. He was in far worse case than Peter. Peter would in time recover. He would be just himself again. But to be harnessed for life to a shattered ideal! To perhaps become cynical. Never to have all those little niches and shrines tucked away in one's life that meant so much.

And there happened on the Sunday evening a strange event in the story of the family. Not a quarrel, but a sudden definite disagreement between two members of it. And the two most unlikely members: Rodney, the idealist, and Peter, the philosopher, suddenly come to life.

## VII

It happened in the garden. Rodney and Ebba were talking about their work. They both belonged to a pacifist organization. Ebba was red hot, and Rodney came along in a slower but more considered partizanship. They talked at great length, and Martin, Magda, and Evelyn chipped in sympathetically. Mr. Querril occasionally intercepted mildly with the "but-we-must-be-prac-

tical" standpoint. Suddenly the invalid from the chair said:

"I think what you're doing is all rot!"

The bombshell was received with an explosion of laughter. Peter was well! Peter was himself again! That was the dominant feeling, but Rodney smiled indulgently, and Ebba superciliously.

"Perhaps it is," said Rodney. "But still we think it's right."

"Peter has returned to find himself a patriot," laughed Martin.

Ebba spoke up in her precise tones:

"No doubt he will be joining up, and going out to fight for the rich Jews of Throgmorton Street."

And then Peter made a most surprising statement. He said:

"If I were well enough I'd join to-morrow!"

This statement was received with far more amazement than his first. It was said sincerely, indeed almost tearfully. It was like a sudden uncomfortable realization that there were two Querril points of view, and they were hopelessly at variance. It had about it, too, the sinister hint of some overpowering actuality. It brought the horror of the day right into that nest on the Surrey heath. It was the first intimation

that the war was a thing which actually concerned the Querril inner life. If Peter was so obviously sincere about himself, it implied that he certainly thought that Martin and Rodney were wrong.

Mrs. Querril looked at her youngest son, and for the first time drew comfort from his sallow face and hollow cheeks. Peter would never be well enough to go to any war.

"Dear me, he's very easily excited since his fever," thought Mrs. Querril.

Rodney soon had himself in hand.

"Well, let us hear what Pedro has got to say," he remarked.

The tears were almost starting from Peter's eyes. He spluttered:

"I can't talk about it. It's too tremendous. It's all part of . . . what I learned in prison. I see things differently. Life is such a big thing. It is n't all as simple as you make out. Everybody is n't just — like us."

"What is he talking about?" asked Ebba.

"Let Peter say what he wants to," snapped Evelyn.

"You've been an interferer, Rodney, all your time. You believed in interference in matters of social reform. You still believe in it. Where are you going to draw the line? All nations are



now interdependent. Nobody's going to shut themselves off and say 'This is our country. We're going to make human sacrifices, indulge in unnatural vices, borrow and not pay back, do just what we like and it's nothing to do with you.' If they do that, they've got to be interfered with. There's growing up not merely a herd instinct, but a world instinct. An uncontrollable desire to have things decently and universally ordered. People are wretched —"

"But, my dear chap, how on earth does a war help matters? It makes it worse. It puts everything back hundreds of years."

"Germany's triumph for world dominion would put everything back a hundred years. If they are broken, social reform — socialism, if you like — will leap into its own at a bound. The world will get together. This stupid movement of yours is helping no one. It can't possibly stop the war. It's simply helping the enemy. It's just as though you came across your dearest friend in a death grip with an enemy and you tried to put his collar straight. . . ."

Peter was very flushed, and Nurse Morson had something to say, but it did n't concern world-politics. Peter was led into the house.

"He does n't begin to understand our point of view," remarked Ebba when he'd gone.



"Well, don't let's talk any more about it," said Magda.

And there the matter, as far as words were concerned, dropped. But the mental impression remained indelible. It produced an indefinable, nervy tension. Every one had to be careful what they said, and think well beforehand. There were raw edges easily irritated. Rodney perhaps was the most disturbed. He hated the idea of disagreeing with Peter, and he was equally as anxious to get to the root of the matter. It was further complicated by their many friends, most of whom were doing war work, and a number of boys who only last summer were playing tennis on their court were now in the trenches, and many would never play again.

The Lemaïres also took the popular side. Madame Lemaïre was a Frenchwoman, and her attitude was as uncompromisingly French as it could be. Annette and Joan wavered for a time, and then Joan went off and did canteen work, and Annette, who had learned to drive her father's car, volunteered for the army transport service. She was passed and sent to France, where she remained till the end of the war.

And one day at breakfast Mr. Querril spluttered with a great excitement when he opened his newspaper. Young Stallard, the boy who stole,

who could do nothing right, and of whom they had lost trace — had won a Victoria Cross at Gallipoli!

One could argue about politics, but the Homeric note was disturbing. In a world of sacrifice and suffering was the altruist to contribute nothing? And the note was insistent among the most unlikely people.

When the warrant was issued for the arrest of Jim Troon on a charge of perjury, he was nowhere to be found. Later it was learned that he was serving on a patrol boat. He had volunteered the day after war was declared. It was Decimus who heard the story of his death from the wife of a naval officer, who had survived a breezy and unreported little incident somewhere off the coast of Ireland. The patrol boat and the submarine had both been sunk. Jim Troon had last been seen in a death-grip with a German officer on the bow of the sinking boat. And so he died for the honor of the only mistress who had held his respect throughout life.

It was all very disturbing!

## CHAPTER XVII

"THERE IS NO ANSWER"

### I

WHEN, in the winter of 1917, Rodney went out to the Great War, his departure revealed the Querril family at their best. The reasons which ultimately prompted him to forego the nimbus of a conscientious objector in favor of the uniform of a lieutenant in the Royal Field Artillery were so involved as to baffle dissection. He quarreled with his wife over the matter. At least if he did not quarrel, their arguments, drawn out over a period of twelve months, reached an *impasse*. Rodney would always ultimately arrive at the same conclusion:

"This is all very well, my dear, but what is going to *happen*? It is certainly established that it was *they* who started it. It was *they* who would not listen. It was *they* who were prepared. Their very success proves their bloodguiltiness. And it is also perfectly certain that if they win they will hold Europe in thrall. Do you think our people will sit down under

that? Do you think the French will? Do you think the Americans will keep outside the ring and see it happen? It means more wars in years to come. If we win, there is a chance — not a certainty, but a good chance — that we may get a world understanding."

"It is simply the struggle for the superimposition of one set of imperial ideas upon another."

"Possibly so. But the imperial ideas of Britain, France, and America might lead to a human commonwealth. The imperial ideas of Germany never could by any stretch of the imagination. Their ideas are about as idealistic as the ideas of Ptolemy the Second. Wilson is a different story. If he could have his way . . ."

It must be said for Ebba that when she found that Rodney had made up his mind, she took it very well. She still argued, but without bitterness. She even entered into all his arrangements when he joined up. She showed her practical sense on more than one occasion when he was on his training. She selected his underclothes, and sent him parcels regularly.

While he was still at the Cadet School at Cambridge, their child was born. She had not forewarned him that it might come so soon, as she did not want him to be worried. It came, a fragile mite, blinking at the brightness of this

surprising world; it gurgled a little, cried a little, flickered for ten long days, and then went out.

Rodney came posthaste. He was terribly upset. He looked at the little pale bud, which had opened a petal and peeped at the portals of life, and had then declined the journey through their entrance. He kissed the smooth crown, and felt somehow responsible. So meaningless! So utterly futile and inexplicable!

He knelt down and kissed his wife, and all he could think to say was:

"Ebba . . . Ebba . . . I'm so sorry. God help you to bear it."

He felt her thrill against him for a moment. Her face was pale but she did not cry.

He wanted to telegraph for his mother, but Ebba said:

"If you please, I think it better not."

He had to return that night, and Ebba made all the arrangements for the notification and for the funeral. She bore it all alone.

## II

Peter went before three medical boards and they all rejected him. He was not even passed for clerical work. On the evening when he returned, disconsolate from his third rejection, the

mind of Mr. Querril was exercised in the following manner:

"Now this is a curious fact. If it had n't been for this . . . deplorable episode, Peter would now be quite fit. He might already be in the trenches. He might by now have been . . . But the doctors agree that he will eventually get all right. Delicate perhaps, but quite reasonably well. It may almost be said that Emma Troon may have saved his life. How delicately interwoven are these little skeins of fate! Just the idle balance of some caprice, and not only a life but the lives of unborn generations are affected."

Peter then took the matter into his own hands. He went up to town and offered his services to the Prisoners of War Relief Committee, and was absorbed into the activities of that society.

Martin also compromised with his conscience. He did nothing till the day of conscription had dawned. Then he equivocated, left it too late to get a commission, volunteered as a private a week before he would have been called, got passed in Medical Category C II, and, being a clever architect and mathematician, was sent to an obscure spot in Yorkshire and made to load clinkers on to a motor lorry, convey them to a military base, and unload them. He did this without variation for two years.



The Querril household gradually went to pieces. Magda moved up to her flat in Chelsea, and the happy arrangement was made that Peter stayed with her, as he was now always in town. (The fatal Pig-sty of course had been given up years ago.)

Evelyn also became restless. She wanted to follow her friends into their war-tainted operations, but she was persuaded by Magda that "somebody really must stop with the darlings."

Annette was in France, Joan was away doing canteen work, whilst Cecil, who was just an awkward, leggy schoolboy on the island, was now an officer in Mesopotamia in charge of a company of solemn-looking Sikhs, each one of whom might have been a headmaster, and Cecil prefect on a week's probation.

### III

On the day before Rodney went to France he went to Chessilton Heath with his wife to say good-by. It was a Sunday, and Magda and Peter were down for the week-end. Martin was the only member of the family who could not be there, but Decimus came in in the afternoon, and also Mr. and Mrs. Lemaire.

It was a day conducted on even more usual

lines than the day of Magda's wedding. A fine December rain was falling, and they sat round the fire in Peter's studio, and played with Jenny and the dogs. Mrs. Querril talked about the extraordinary difficulties of getting marmalade, and the outrageous prices that laundries were charging for their work. Mr. Querril became eloquent about an illustrated book on "the Quattrocento," recently published in Edinburgh. Decimus read out some typewritten sonnets he had got hold of. They were for private circulation only. They were extremely witty and were ascribed to Max Beerbohm, although Decimus was not entirely convinced about the authorship. One which concerned certain august personages elicited roars of laughter. Peter read out a letter from Tony MacDowell, which also added to the merriment. Poor Tony had also been turned down as a soldier by the United States military authorities, and instead had been put into an army clothing department as a clerk! and he was furious about it! It wasn't at all what he meant. He had meant to go over, see his old mother in Michigan, eat green corn on the cob, and just boost the United States into the war, and then perhaps take charge of an army corps, or become Director of Naval Construction. Instead of that he was checking packets of trouser

buttons. The war produced many of these anomalies.

When it became time for Rodney to go, the posture of nonchalance was carried off magnificently. Mr. Querril made a great to-do about comparing the watches and clocks. He said:

"You've got plenty of time for your train. Don't hurry. Don't forget that they always leave the signals down on Sundays on this line, so if you see them down you don't have to rush. Eh? yes, that clock's seven minutes fast by the station time. I put my watch right by it yesterday. I don't think Mother and I will walk over to-night — bit wet under foot — can't-see where you're stepping in the dark. Lie down, Potash! You won't forget to call at Cox's in the morning about that draft? You'll have plenty of time. Hope you'll have better weather when you — on your next leave. Er — good-by, my boy!"

There was something fine about the way Rodney took his father's hand, the old twinkle coming into his eye as he said:

"Well, good-by, George! I'd like to see any press-cuttings about that Quatrocento book."

Mrs. Querril kissed him and said bravely:

"Good-by, my darling. Write when you can."

Magda smiled and held him in a long hug.

"Good-by, old Roddles; come back quite soon."

Ebba, Peter, and Evelyn walked to the station with him, and the only apparently down-cast member of the party was Ebba, silent and white to the lips.

#### IV

From that Sunday when Rodney came to say good-by to that fatal day when a telegram came to Ebba to express His Majesty's regret that he had been killed in action seemed a very brief flash of time. It was in fact the following March, at the beginning of the last great German offensive. Ebba's telegram simply said:

"Rodney killed coming to-night, Ebba."

It was Evelyn who opened the telegram. She was alone in the house with her father and mother. She said to the telegraph girl:

"There is no answer."

There certainly was not. There was nothing to be said at all. Nothing, nothing, nothing. Only to race to her bedroom and throw herself on the bed. Oh! why was n't Magda here! That was her first wild instinct. She dared not face this new and awful calamity alone. She dared not think of it, only how to cope with the dire problem of breaking it to the others! . . . That was the point to concentrate on. She must think and think only of "the darlings." They

were sitting there now in the room beneath her, her father reading "The Nation," and her mother knitting woolen socks for Rodney! And Rodney was dead . . . dead . . . dead. Rodney would never come back again. They would never see him smile again, never hear that calm, smooth voice. They would probably never know just how he died. Somewhere alone, out in the darkness . . .

It would n't do. Evelyn must n't think like that. She must pull herself together. She had got to tell them. She did n't know it, but the tears were streaming down her cheeks. She groped her way down the well-lighted staircase, and entered the drawing-room. Her father looked up and blinked above the shaded reading lamp.

"Was that the post, dear?" he asked.

Evelyn held the telegram in her hand. She was utterly unnerved, unprepared. She suddenly threw herself forward and buried her face in her mother's lap.

"Ebba is coming . . ." She sobbed and thrust the telegram towards her father.

Mr. Querril coughed, and sluttered, and re-adjusted his glasses.

"Er — what is — er — let me see —"

He read the telegram. He read it through



twice, his lips twitching in a silent articulation of the words. Then he put it down, and said very quietly:

"Rodney is killed, dear."

Mrs. Querril had undoubtedly divined the tragic import. She sunk back in her chair, and the tears started to her eyes, but she said nothing. Evelyn hugged her for a long time and she felt her mother's heart beating very rapidly. After a silence which nothing could fill, Mrs. Querril said:

"Does Ebba say what time she's coming, darling?"

Immediate distraction for Mr. Querril. Timetables to be consulted, and all the watches and clocks compared. Yes, Ebba would probably arrive about 8.45. They would telephone to Jebbley to meet her with his Victoria. Should they telephone to Magda and Peter? No, no, writing was better in such a case. Write to them and write to Martin. Or wire to Magda to come down first thing in the morning. Magda was splendid in times of trouble.

#### V

Mrs. Querril was put to bed before Ebba arrived. Her heart was not quite what it was.



Palpitations and faintness. Ring up Dr. Fox, also old Decimus. Nice to have old friends around one. . . .

Decimus came first, hurried and solemn. He shook Mr. Querril's hand, and kissed Evelyn. Then he sat ponderously down by the fire, and read the telegram through twenty or thirty times, as though hoping to discover by the lantern of Diogenes the solution of this cruel attack upon the happiness of those he loved.

And then came Ebba, no longer the reformer, the hygienist, the arbiter of the moral conscience of mankind, but just a woman who has lost everything. Her cheeks were colorless, the pupils of her eyes distended, her clothes thrown on anyhow. She looked like a woman who has just escaped from prison, or like one who is trying to escape from some unbearable conditions.

She sank into a chair and groaned. Evelyn kissed her, and cried, and tried her best to make comforting remarks, but she sat there quite unresponsive and stared at the fire.

The essayist in the corner found himself thinking:

"Now this is quite surprising. I'd no idea it was like this. It was evidently only Rodney who made the mistake. And she never suspected. Rodney must have been a fine chap.

He would have seen it through to the end. I suppose people must sometimes live their whole lives like that, live a white lie to the bitter end."

It was nearly half an hour later that the mood of Ebba changed. She cried and then suddenly began to talk, bitterly, passionately, almost incoherently:

"It would not have been so bad if he had really believed in it all — but he never did — He was half-hearted. He hated all these politics like I do. Oh! but it is cruel! . . . cruel, cruel. Why is it all? What are all these vague ideas compared to the lives of those we love?

"He was my man. I would have followed him anywhere. I loved him. Even at the end I lied to him to make him happy. I tried to comfort him that what he did was right. I spoke against my convictions. I would have thrown all my convictions away to give him one hour's happiness. I would have lied myself to hell. Oh! it is cruel, cruel — unspeakable. Millions of these boys — all the very best — just to serve the purpose of capitalist governments. Let them go in the trenches — the dirty swine! He was my man. He was the father of my little one. And now they have both gone. And the King sends his regrets! Bah! I spit at the King! I hate them all. A fool of a woman in our road she

says, 'You must be proud that your man died for his country.' Rubbish! What do I care? I want *him*. I want my man back. Will his country care for me and love me? This is all talk, done to blind people to the truth. I tell you at the back of it all is cent per cent, contracts — what you call it — jobs, profits, and *nothing else at all*. I loved my husband, and we were happy, and they take him away, poison him with their filthy press, dress him in stupid clothes, blow him to pieces, leave him to die in the darkness, and then say they regret! O God! I can't bear it."

None of the others spoke. Evelyn was crying, Mr. Querril moved restlessly in his chair, and Decimus remained immovably silent.

Suddenly Ebba stood up and swayed by the fireplace. Her bosom heaved and she dabbed her temples with her handkerchief. Her voice returned to its chilling note:

"Perhaps only in one way I cheat them. . . . I gave my Rodney a present before he went. A small white packet always to keep by him."

"What was that?" came from the dark mountain in the corner.

"Morphia!

"Do you think I did n't know all this was going to happen? I have seen it all a thousand

times. My Rodney lying bleeding out in the open, and I say, 'Anyway they sha'n't make him suffer — for long.' I hope to God he was able to take it!"

## VI

Then Mr. Querril spoke. He said:

"Dear me, how very distressing."

And the singular ineptness of the remark slashed the air like a knife.

It came more in the nature of an appeal, the cry of a Querril to have done with all these heroics. It suggested that what was distressing was not the information imparted by Ebba, but the atmosphere of crude emotion she was creating. Ebba was genuine enough, but she never appeared so alien to the Querril world as at that moment. Fancy dragging all one's niches and shrines into the open! And then the melodramatic reference to morphia! Who was this foreign woman coming here and calling Rodney "her man," and shouting about her love for him like an animal crying for its mate? . . . Of course it was all true, horribly real, overpowering in its primitive force and all the more — distressing. Distressing to Evelyn that all the fine sensibilities of her father's sympathetic nature should be so roused — almost outraged. Dis-

tressing to Mr. Querril that Evelyn should be sobbing in this woman's arms, that his friend Decimus should be a witness of the disruption.

It was not like Rodney, almost an insult to Rodney. Rodney would be terribly distressed that she should have told them about the morphia; distressed that she should have jarred the raw edges of their emotion. Rodney would have said nothing. Any experience he had had to endure he would have endured — *fortiter et recte*, like a Querril, like a — gentleman.

The stress of this abrupt experience seemed to pull Mr. Querril together. He stood up, and patted Ebba on the shoulder. He said kindly, but with a firm control of his voice:

"There, there, my dear. We must all try and bear this for the sake of each other."

In some respects it was an unfortunate remark. It appeared to anger Ebba. The vein she struck was bordering on the hysterical.

"Ah, yes," she cried. "It is all very well for you. You have 'each other.' I have no each other. For me it is all finished. What is the good of pretending? You, none of you . . . you don't even like me. I am alone."

"Ebba, dear," sobbed Evelyn, "you know we all love you."

"You love me at this moment because you are



sorry for me. But to-morrow? Next month? Next year?"

"We will always love you, Ebba."

Decimus winced, and Mr. Querril, who was walking up and down the room, like an animal seeking some egress from its cage, rang the bell.

Mrs. Yardley was communicated with. She and Evelyn together got Ebba to bed, accompanied by the usual two hot-water bottles. When they had administered what comfort they could, both spiritual and material, they tip-toed downstairs, and Mrs. Yardley remarked:

"Poor lamb! There's many a million 'aving to go through what she's going through. Many a million fine young gentlemen like Master Rodney won't never come back to their wives and sweethearts. Gawd! that Kayser! . . . I'd like to 'ave 'im for 'alf an hour alone in the boiler 'ouse!"

By which dark menace — playing so fine a tribute of confidence in her own physical attributes — Mrs. Yardley conveyed the idea that her political judgment in any case differed from that of the lamb upstairs.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE FORESHORE WOMAN

#### I

PETER, encumbered by a heavy kit of sketching materials, walked briskly up the hill. His limbs, cramped by the confined position in which he had spent the afternoon, responded joyously to the springy surface of the moor. He walked on and on, humming to himself, and absorbing little painters' visions of gorse and hill and scudding clouds. His cheeks were brown with the sun and wind. His step was light. For the first time for many years he felt that exhilarating sense of contact with his surroundings which only good health can give.

Up and up he went, and suddenly the sea lay before him, a vast movement of varying lights and colors. The horizon was lost in mist, except to the east where a long strip caught the sun like a knife-edge. He hurried on to the edge of the cliff. The expanse of vision was enormous. A long unaccountable line of foamy green suddenly ended in a dark bank of blue-gray. In

the great scheme of these elements, tiny ships, revealed at odd intervals, appeared evanescent and insubstantial.

"This is no painter's job," thought Peter.

But it was very moving, very impressive. He stood there a long time, trying to take it all in. And suddenly the buoyant mood passed. The cold hand of loneliness touched his heart. This panorama, which was so extensive that one could scarcely judge the scale, produced in him a yearning for companionship. The little corner of the moor, where he had painted a rough road vanishing into a clump of trees, was like a friend, tangible and confiding; but this was disturbing, like finding oneself behind the scenes of the universe, looking into a workshop where the elemental forces were turned out. It was like a bland exegesis of fatality. A million men or a million years, what is it in all this? One small man in gray flannels, with a sketching outfit — what in God's name does he matter?

And Peter wanted to matter tremendously. He had muddled his little piece of life, muddled it and paid the penalty. He had suffered, been down to hell, and by a miracle he had returned. And he had found hell a most informing place. It had given him a clearer vision of the road that lay before him. What was left should be conse-

crated to noble ends. There was so much to do, to build, to understand. And all these things one had to face and carry out alone. Only . . . there is a price to virility. The invalid takes on a kind of protective coloring. The invalid in any case is spoilt and petted. But when one can swing alone free and strong in the winds of heaven, is it sufficient to seek noble ends—alone? Peter turned eastwards. By the gap above Furley Beacon was a path that led down to the shore. "The family" would probably be there.

## II

Peter walked briskly, but he could not quite shake off the mood of loneliness that had suddenly assailed him. And the mood irritated him because he could not dissipate it with the big reflections of the philosopher. He could not argue himself out of it. Was it a physical thing? a legacy of prison life?

"A kind of entailed estate!" he thought. "I suppose all through my life I shall be a prey to these megrims of melancholy."

The conclusion brought him no consolation. It was weak to be a slave of moods. He reached the gap by Furley Beacon. He rested for a moment, and then, as though impelled by some un-

accountable instinct, he hurried down the chalk cutting to the beach. When he arrived there he sat down, and looked at the sea. It was no longer a vast and unmanageable perspective, but a low horizon with long lines of foaming white and gray, humming over the sands.

And then Peter suddenly became alive to the fact that fifty yards away was the figure of a woman looking out to sea. She was wearing a blue-gray frock, but she had no hat, and the wind was gently fanning the free strands of her hair, and pulling her skirt tightly eastwards, as though possessed with a whimsical anxiety to see this fine brown hair blow free, and to have a more intimate view of the slender, graceful figure. And Peter had two simultaneous thoughts. One was:

“There’s some naughty old god out there who wants to tear her clothes off.”

The other was:

“It’s the foreshore woman!”

Perhaps, aided by some instinct of chivalry produced by the first-mentioned thought, but more by the compelling revelation of the second, Peter Querril threw down his sketching stool and left all the other paraphernalia of the journeyman landscape-painter in a heap, and walked across the sands to her. She was right by the

edge of the sea, which seemed to be throwing out its long white arms seductively. She did not turn till he was within a few yards, then she swung round and looked at him. It was quite true. In her eyes there danced the sparkle of the waters, the glow of life in the making, the love-light made by the sea when God was young. And she stretched out her arms and said:

"Peter! . . . Peter! My Peter!"

And he took her hands and kissed them, and they stood there looking at each other amidst the hiss of the waters, and the screams of a flock of gulls that had just discovered some delectable garbage being washed ashore. And for all they knew they might have been standing on the water, or in the clouds, or in some place where all is light and movement, where nothing has ever happened before, but is now happening abruptly, terrifically . . . where there is no time, no connection with anything else, but just one surging effulgence sufficient unto itself.

It was significant that he only kissed her hands. There was a momentary reaction of constraint. They were like two people who had been suddenly blinded by looking up at the sun. Peter held her hand, and said almost limply:

"I did n't know you were here."

She laughed, and he saw the breath of the old



god playing around her smooth cheeks and her disheveled hair. She was talking, but he was so consumed with the unexpected discovery of her imminence, he could hardly listen. What was surprising was not that it could happen — of course it was bound to happen as surely as that the tide would reach its appointed landmark — but that it could happen with such dynamic thoroughness, so suddenly, fiercely, inevitably. Such a consuming business. What was she saying?

“We were demobilized last Tuesday. . . .”

Now here was a curious position! Demobilized! Fancy demobilizing a foreshore woman! a goddess! The world was crazy!

“You’ve no idea how ripping it is to get out of those beastly old clothes, and get into a comfy frock!”

“My dear, the naughty old god out there was trying to pull it off you!”

“What are you talking about, Peter?”

They were walking side by side along the shore, and he put his arm round her waist in the manner of the old days. Now and then they peeped at each other. How she had developed! She looked stronger, firmer, finer . . . but she was still Annette. What was the mystery of it all? Why was she just “old Annette” of yore, and



now she suddenly blazes down on him, a consuming deity — a foreshore woman!

## III

They drifted under the shadow of the cliff, and Peter said:

"When you stand on the shore why do you gaze out to sea?"

"Well, you silly old thing, I don't know. I suppose the sea's more amusing!"

Amusing? Oh, no! Peter shook his head. That would n't do at all. They sat on the hollow basin of a rock, and he fumbled with her hand, as though pondering over the levity of her remark.

"I'll tell you why it is, Annette. The sea is afraid of you and he loves you madly. You see he made the love-light in your eyes. But he was only the workman. The love-light was n't made for him. That's what angers him. He's wearing himself out. He's an aristocrat, the sea. He thinks the land is bourgeois, a *nouveau arrivée*. . . ."

Peter looked very solemn. He was trying to unravel the imponderable, to recall some tangled impression. A whimsical smile played around the mouth of Annette.

"This does n't explain why *I* look out to sea, Peter."

"No. . . . But you see the love-light is there, and it was n't made for the sea."

"Who was it made for, Peter?"

"Some thug way over the other side of the horizon!"

"Some what?"

"Some thug!"

"Whatever is a thug?"

"I don't know. It's a term Tony used. I think it means a very unpleasant person . . . a chap who has done all sorts of things . . . wicked things. Played havoc with his life . . . and suffered for it. I suppose I'm a kind of thug!"

Peter buried his face in his hands. The smile left Annette's lips. She was impressed by the curious solemnity of the boy's manner. He must have endured experiences in which all these symbols were involved. He was all mixed up—queer. He would have to be helped out of it. She rested her hand on his shoulder.

"Peter dear, I know what you mean."

They looked at each other's eyes, and the flash of understanding could not be disregarded. Peter pulled himself up into a kind of ball. He sat on his haunches, with his arms clutching his

legs, and his chin hovering above his knees. His voice sounded hollow as he crowded his sentences one on top of the other breathlessly :

“ No, no, it's no good, Annette. Don't look at me with those dear eyes of yours. I'm not good enough for that. I'm all smirched and spoilt. I've been right down into the deep pit. I'll carry the clay of it all my life. I'm an outcast, a waster, a — thug! It's all a mid-summer madness. I've got to see it through alone! Oh, God! how I envy Rodney. To have gone out in the big way! Given oneself for a cause. . . . To have lived tremendous, compact hours, and then the sudden flash and all is over. No regrets, no awful memories, no legacy of loneliness. I used not to believe in hell, but I dare n't tell. . . . I simply dare n't tell what I have suffered — ”

Annette became suddenly very alert. Her shining eyes never once left his face. It was as though she realized that she and Peter had stumbled into some awful dilemma, and the responsibility of getting out of it rested upon her, and upon her alone. She had once driven a car in France that an *aéroplane* above was trying to bomb. The sensation was not dissimilar. She had kept her head on that occasion, and she

meant to keep it on this. Peter was right out of hand. He raced on:

"I've never told any one before. It's not what they did to me. It's what I did to myself and to — the others. I've dragged them all down with me. . . . Emma. I never really loved her. That's what makes it so disgusting and yet . . . you can't understand this, Annette. You don't know. If you've ever had an experience like that there's a kind of sacred bond. It isn't just simply an animal business. And afterwards . . . Oh, God! I've ruined her!"

Annette sat meditatively apart, her small chin resting on her hands. There was nothing of the foreshore woman about her now. She was just a very modern young person who had knocked about the world, and was facing a difficult situation calmly.

"When I was well enough," Peter continued, "I went up to London and sought her out. I found that she had left Grete's. He had turned her out. I waited for her one Friday outside the lawyer's where she goes to collect the money. She recognized me all right, but I hardly recognized her. Her face and everything about her had coarsened. I went home with her. She had a small flat in Bloomsbury. She did n't seem

to have any bitterness against me. She was quite normal only . . . dulled, finished. Even then I did n't quite realize, not till I had been there some little time. And I shall never forget, never, as long as I live, the tones of her voice, a kind of husky lisp. . . . She caught hold of me suddenly and she said, 'Well, come on, kid. What about business?' That's what she said — just like that, 'Come on, kid. What about business?' And the words will ring in my ears forever. It was only then that the full significance dawned on me. Just the atmosphere of the room, the flashy mirror, scent, a bed only consisting of a mattress and pillow. . . . And, oh, God! It was I . . . it was I who had driven her to this!"

#### IV

The sun had set, and the gulls were wrangling amidst some dark objective along the beach. Martins swung in circles above their heads, and the sea roared dully as it withdrew its white arms farther and farther away from these two small people perched upon the rock.

Annette toyed with a chain round her neck, as though she were waiting for the storm of remorse to subside. Then she said quietly:

"Peter, I should n't be a bit surprised if you're not a genius!"

"What do you mean?"

"You're such a baby! I believe that all great men are like that. They're just helpless babies about anything except their own job. Some one has got to mother them all the time."

"You can't understand what it's like, Annette."

"Now you've got to be very sensible. I'm not a fool, Peter. For four years I've lived among girls and soldiers. I've seen awful things, moral and physical — much worse than you have. I know what goes on. And I've changed a lot since the old days when we did nothing but play tennis and be sweet to each other. 'The Querril set' — as we called it — gave one a false impression. Life is a sterner business than that. This is how I see your case. It is quite true that you made a fool of yourself on one occasion. You were carried away by all sorts of conflicting emotions at the time. You were absurdly young. You lost your head. Well? I know that crowds of quite nice people do that. Others not quite so nice make a regular practice of it. It's got to be faced. It is n't the end of all things."

Peter looked startled. He could not believe



that his foreshore woman could hold such worldly views. It was almost a disillusionment. He untied his legs and gripped two handfuls of sand from the beach below.

"But the girl . . . the result!" he said hoarsely.

"Now, look here, Peter," replied the modern young woman. "Any one would be sorry for that girl. She's a slave of circumstances and environment. Tell me, when she came to the flat, did she give you the impression of being an innocent child, who had never been . . . kissed — for example?"

"No, as a matter of fact she kissed me first, I remember."

"Now think it over, Peter, and don't tell me the answer. What *sort* of kiss did she give you? It's rather important."

"We were standing by the door. Suddenly she put her head back and closed her eyes. She —"

"I don't want to know, Peter."

"I'm sorry."

"It's all right. I saw her one day in court. Poor wretch! The state has made no provision for girls like that. They are predestined to be women of the street. She had all the qualities — laziness, lack of imagination, sensuality, love

of ease, and at the back of it all — driving poverty. I am very doubtful whether you were the first. She said her father drove her there, but she need not have come. She need not have kissed you . . . in that way. She need not have come out of the room of which you gave her the key. And afterwards? Was she upset? Not the slightest. She shut you out of her life and took the money. She went to live with a rich man till he turned her out. Before that she had lived with an Austrian waiter. And now although she has enough to live on, she still leads an immoral life. It's horrible, Peter, but it's a grim fact. You made no difference one way or the other."

"I can't believe that! I can't believe it! In any case I contributed to her downfall."

"Life is a rough-and-tumble, Peter dear, a conflict. We've all got to take a chance. We're none of us perfect. And sometimes our imperfections help as much as our virtues. It does n't do to be always harking back and sentimentalizing. We destroy ourselves in that way. If we make mistakes we must still carry on. I learned that in France. It's a great phrase — to carry on. Oh! Peter, you have simply got to carry on, do you understand me?"

The light was failing, and Peter was quite

silent. He sat there for some moments, immersed in thought. Suddenly he became aware of an unexpected and distressing embarrassment. His companion was crying. The foreshore woman was leaning forward with her face buried in her hands. He touched her arm and whispered:

"Annette . . . Annette!"

## V

She completed her sobs to a satisfactory condition of sustained moisture. Then suddenly she burst out:

"What do I care for all this, Peter? If you can't think of yourself, think of me. Why should I be destroyed for Emma Troon? I want to be just selfish. I want to fight for my own happiness. I love you. Oh! can't you see I love you? I want you. You belong to me. I won't have you talking all this nonsense. You've suffered enough. I've suffered enough. I don't want you to regret, to have all these beastly feelings —"

"Annette . . . Annette!"

"Peter, I love you. I would make every experience sacred for you. I'd wrap my life round yours so that you should not suffer. I know I'm selfish, but I don't care. I simply don't care!"

"Annette, I did n't understand."

"Peter, take me in your arms. Hold me tight. Give me your lips, Peter. I love you. I can't go on without you. Oh! darling, don't you understand?"

"Annette, I love you. Only I 'm frightened."

"Kiss me, Peter. Again . . . again . . . again. O-oh!"

It was almost dark. The sea was still receding. The wicked old god had slunk sullenly away, realizing that the game was up. And still they sat there holding each other, lost in the mystery of a magic communion. There was so much to tell each other; all the little things that had ever happened, and which suddenly seemed to awaken into new significances — it was impossible to know where to begin. So they said nothing at all. They tucked all these newly important things away among the shrines and niches, soon to be filled by the little figures of each other's whimsies and desires and loves. A world was in the making; as yet too crowded with fragrant anticipations to talk about. They could only peer across the threshold at eyes which flashed back vast and mysterious promises, the fulfilment of vague dreams, the dawn of unrealized imaginings. . . . They touched each other as though fearful of some twilight treach-

ery. For a long time they would remain silent, then suddenly break out into snatches of wild interrogative and passionate affirmation. It was the woman of the world who eventually said:

"Peter, strike a match!"

He did as he was ordered, and she looked at her wrist-watch. Then she said:

"Peter, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. It's past nine. The darlings will think we are drowned!"

The philosopher was too consumed with his own affairs to be impressed by this statement.

He held her tighter, and kissed her. And the dialogue proceeded on recognized lines.

"Oh! Peter, can it be true?"

"You're the loveliest thing in the world!"

"I love you."

"Say it again. Five times."

"I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. How many was that?"

"Four!"

"Oh, Peter, it was six!"

"You darling liar, say it again and you will be right."

"I love you, but I believe you cheated."

"Don't argue, you're wasting time."

"What am I to do, master?"

"Kiss me five times!"

"I've already kissed you a hundred times."

"But you must n't leave off. You must keep on for years and years."

"The gulls are watching and the sea is sulky."

"I know. I want the old god out there to have a good view. He tried to tear off your frock. He has got to understand that you're mine . . . mine . . . mine."

"Oh! Peter!"

And with such banalities do philosophers and angels regale themselves in pervacious moments.

## VI

In the furnished house overlooking the bay which the Querrils had taken for the month of August, Mr. and Mrs. Querril, Martin, and Evelyn were patiently awaiting their evening meal. Magda was up in Scotland staying with John's people, and her second child, who was unpatriotic enough also to be a girl, was already three months old.

Mr. and Mrs. Lemaire and Joan occupied another furnished house barely ten minutes' walk away, and Annette had telegraphed that afternoon that she was on her way down.

Lieutenant Cecil, with a tooth-brush mustache



and a wrist-watch, and his well-cut clothes, was still somewhere in the East, "Old Thing-ing" the Sphinx doing his duty punctiliously, raging, being a gentleman, and generally contributing to the establishment of the English code.

Peter had been out sketching since lunch time, and it was now half-past eight. They always dined — or supped — at eight o'clock, which was late for them, but the arrangement was made in order to give Peter the benefit of the evening light. Naturally he was often late. At half-past eight Mrs. Querril decided that George ought not to wait longer, and so the meal was brought in, and consumed in tranquillity. At a quarter to nine Evelyn said:

"I know what it is. Peter has met Annette. They haven't seen each other for four years."

"Peter was always late about everything," replied Mrs. Querril, as though there were some connection between these two ideas. In Mrs. Querril's mind everything connected with Peter was static. He was still a little boy, although destined to marry Annette one day. She still quoted the incidents of his extreme youth, but from the day he went to prison she seemed to lose all touch with him except as regards his

material comforts. It was as though by a supreme effort she had brought down the shutter with such a snap she could not open it again. She was if anything more openly loving to him, but it was only the little boy who existed. The fate of Rodney she accepted like the gentlest of Stoics. Of Martin she talked of his future and his ambitions, but Peter was a little boy who one day stole Sir Phillip's apples, who said such quaint things, who looked such a little angel in the velvet suit with the lace trimming.

She never tired of telling stories about Peter, but if any one said that they thought it would be good for Peter to go to Paris and study, or that Peter was growing up and would one day marry and settle down, a puzzled look would come to her old face and she would say:

"Well, I don't know, my dear. We must see."

At a quarter-past nine Joan appeared. Her face was flushed with excitement. She said:

"I am a bearer of good tidings. Annette and Peter have just turned up at our house. They look too silly for words. They say they're engaged!"

Evelyn exclaimed, "O-oh! I am glad!"

Martin grinned and said, "Really?"

Mr. Querril pirouetted on the carpet, and jerked out, "You don't say so!"

Joan threw her arms round Mrs. Querril and said:

"Are n't you pleased, Aunt Jenny?"

Mrs. Querril smiled, and shook her head.

"You *are* pleased, are n't you, Aunt Jenny?"

Mrs. Querril continued smiling pleasantly.

"Peter and Annette?" she muttered after a while. "Why, of course, dear, but —"

"But *what*, Aunt Jenny?"

"Peter was always going to marry Annette. Don't you remember the night they were lost up on Folly's Head? We searched all over the garden and heath with lanterns. . . . I remember poor Lydia, she's dead now, poor girl! She married the postman at Graynehurst and had three children — she wanted to drag the pond by Mr. Burney's farm, all in the dark by herself. She cried her eyes out because we would not let her. . . ."

Nothing could convince Mrs. Querril that evening that anything unusual had happened. She seemed to harbor a suspicion that the young people were in some way trying to pull her leg. Of course Peter was engaged to Annette!

## VII

When they both appeared half an hour later looking very disheveled, self-satisfied, and, as Joan said, silly, the usual formalities of embracing were disposed of very quickly. They were both too agitated to eat, and Peter was in a hurry because he had to see Annette home, and loyal Joan slipped discreetly away.

It was nearly an hour later when Annette came home. Joan had gone to bed — the two girls shared the same room. Annette half undressed and stretched herself luxuriously on her bed.

"Well?" said Joan sleepily.

"Life is very nice," replied her sister. "It's all over, and we're all going to lie around and have a good time. The war has taught us a lot, darling. It's taught us the great value of selfishness. I'm going to be just thoroughly selfish and do exactly as I like forever and ever, amen!"

"Are you?" murmured Joan doubtfully. She was in no mood for argument.

Annette got into bed and turned out the light. Ten minutes later Joan was on the borderland of sleep, when she was startled into wakefulness by a muffled sound. She sat up and whispered:

"Annette darling, are you crying?"

There was a brief interval, and then the whispered reply:

"No, darling, I was laughing!"

"Why were you laughing, Annette?"

"Oh! I don't know. One just has to sometimes. It's all such a game!"

## CHAPTER XIX

THE MAN WHO GRUMBLED HIS WAY TO GOD

### I

**"FOR** *he's a jolly good fellow!*"

Decimus shut the door of his flat in Adelphi Terrace, and entered his comfortable sitting-room. He turned on the electric light, and walked to the easy chair by the fire. He flung his cavalier's cloak and opera hat carelessly on to another chair and sat down.

*"For he's a jolly good fellow!"*

The words and music were still ringing in his ears. It had been a triumph! Nearly every one who counted in the literary and artistic world had been there. The dinner given to Decimus Postern on celebrating his twenty-five years' connection with the great publishing house of Bard, Frobisher & Bard. Sir George Bard himself in the chair. A jolly, intimate dinner, not too large. All the wits and characters of Fleet Street. Brilliant speeches, but — acclaimed by every one — the speech of the evening, that of



"Our guest." Decimus had been in form. He knew he had been in form. Little epigrams had tripped off his lips — two quite *extempore* — sly digs at some of his contemporaries, and then just that note of sentiment towards the end, genuine affection for the men among whom he had worked, and spent so great a part of his life. And they had toasted him and sung that song, and Decimus had felt — humid and moved. They were dear good fellows, all of them. Their enthusiasm was contagious. Certainly there had been a good deal of champagne flowing, but it was not only the champagne that made them stand up and cry out:

"Good old Decimus! Bravo Dess! Bravo Postern!"

The roar of delight which greeted him when he stood up! He had drunk very little himself. He might have had a glass or two of wine. He hardly noticed. Life itself was sufficiently intoxicating.

Twenty-five years! And he was — twenty-seven when old Bard — now Sir George — first asked him to be one of their readers. Twenty-five years ago! What changes and contrasts he had observed in that time. How many of his dear friends of the eighties and nineties — giants in their day — were now no more! And then

searing gaps among younger men who might themselves have been giants had it not been for the hungry maw of the great Moloch, who had demanded them young and fresh and had seemed to prefer them brilliant.

Decimus lighted his pipe and stared at the fire. He had left fairly early after the speeches were finished. He had a peculiar repugnance to the fag end of a dinner like that, when men drink whisky, and become reminiscent, and maudlin, and indecent. It let the whole thing down. He wanted to escape to the quiet sanctuary of this comfortable room and persuade himself that it was all true. That he was held in respect and affection by his colleagues, that he was a jolly good fellow, that, in short, his life was a success.

Fifty-two years old, and right at the top of the tree, famous, popular, comparatively a rich man.

Decimus stared at the fire, and the little ormolu clock on the mantel-shelf ticked almost inaudibly, as though endeavoring to attune its importunate beat to the mellow hour. The coals crackled, and a small sandy kitten — the property of old Jonquet, his factotum — stretched and yawned luxuriously.

Decimus looked at the clock. It was a quarter-past ten. Comparatively early. He wished he

had not hurried away from the dinner so precipitately. He felt by no means sleepy. He did n't feel particularly talkative, but he wanted something. . . . Perhaps to be talked to, to be cross-examined. If some one were to say . . .

The mind and imagination of Decimus became acutely active. An abrupt vision presented itself. The empty Cromwellian chair facing him. The light from the shaded lamp, the play of the firelight. The heavy background of velvet curtains. It was the right setting. \It only required its central feature, a feature upon which his imagination would insist so vividly. A figure, all clothed in one of those soft clinging things, all ribbons and laces, catching the firelight. A face half-hidden in the shadows with the little flicks of hair, silky and gossamer-like, glowing beneath the lamp. And a voice — perhaps sleepy and purry like the kitten — but warm and caressing:

“Well, dear, was the dinner a great success?”

Ridiculous! Decimus mounted the Trojan walls and sighed his love towards the empty chair, and struggled.

Fame, popularity, money, what are they all when the chair is empty? A puling, sentimental old fool, he was n't going to succumb to this emotional temptation. God's truth! he was hard-

ened to it. He, the master of words, who had never had the genius to say just the right few words at the right moment. The only words that really mattered.

## II

But it was not only the words he lacked. There must be some other quality missing. Women liked him, confided in him, found him sympathetic, and then there seemed to come — a sudden emptiness. A lack of technic in the erotic craft. He never appealed to them in that way. And when he was young, he was not always — humid.

Beneath the florid automata of his personality there lay a great simplicity. He could pose but he couldn't pretend. He could flatter but he could n't flirt. He could be ironic, fantastic, incredibly flippant, but he could n't betray his conscience. The postures and insincerities of his appearance and often of his work were things of which his soul took cognizance and laughed. When he was a young man he had loved many women in the way that a poet may love the turn of a couplet, or some haunting phrase. And one by one he had seen them pass. He had never had the ability to say the right word. On a day they would come to him and say:

"Have you heard that Phyllis is engaged?"

Or, "Do you know, Decimus, that Olivia is going to marry that young Seton-Balcombe?"

He had heard all this and quivered. Felt morose, groped at the new emptiness, and then — observed it in terms of literature. And the thing would become further and further embedded.

"Decimus, I hear that Phyllis has twins," and "I say, old man, Mrs. Seton-Balcombe's second boy has been sent down from Cambridge."

Mrs. Seton-Balcombe's second boy! Oh, God! the ravages of time!

He was nearly forty when the big thing came. He was already heavy and slightly humid, not so heavy and humid as now, but no sort of life-mate for Old Querril's lovely daughter. He saw it at a glance, never for an instant deceived himself, never showed by the flicker of an eyelid the insolence of his desires. He merely sat about, and watched, and waited for the desolating information:

"Have you heard that Magda is engaged?"

And when it came, he made no comment, only he knew that the last great emptiness of all was on him. And he could not see Magda "in terms of literature." He could only see her, as on those occasions which formed some little landmark in his career, a diaphanous figure seated in



the old Cromwellian chair. Warm, sleepy, furry . . . irresistible.

"Well, dear, was the dinner a great success?"

Decimus picked up the kitten, and placed it on his knee. It looked ridiculously small on the vast expanse of his black trousers.

"Well, Babette," he said. "It's been a great night, has n't it?"

He had been a cad after that! Not in act but in thought. A nasty, searing, trickling thought which obsessed him for a long time. The war! John! He would be killed! It was disgusting to be attacked by thoughts like that. Criminal! No, God knows he never hoped it! It was only that his imagination would run on with the little pictures. Magda in distress. He, the old friend and confidant. Magda coming more and more to rely on his sympathy. He would be so sympathetic . . . so kind, so gentle. But the war was over, and he had seen John at Chessilton Heath with the almost scared, outraged expression on his face as he exclaimed:

"They never came out! They never came out!"

His hair had turned gray in four and a half years, but he looked very fit and strong . . . only outraged, just outraged that the purposes of his life had been thwarted. A fine fellow.



And now the third child had arrived. A boy at last. George. Of course there would be sure to be a George, thrusting him still farther away. George and the dragon!

The dragon put the kitten down, and sighed, as well as dragon might sighing for the lists of great adventure and finding only — a domestic cat.

### III

After all he had had great happiness. Many and very dear friends. His old friend Querril, and his wife who was now so delicate, and Evelyn, the only one at home. Rodney killed. Peter and his wife living in Italy. Magda and her family in Scotland. Martin married to a Canadian girl and settled in Toronto, where he was managing a publishing business. Not all according to Mrs. Querril's dream. Well, we all had to live our own life, and find love in our own life. You cannot circumscribe the good stuff. You push on the best way you can, stumbling over each other's experiences. We're all much better than we think we are. The trouble is to believe that. There's such a heavy legacy of doubt and distrust.

"And now they want to legislate our characters," he thought. "To circumscribe our

happiness. The Querrils tried that and failed. Whatever we do, legislate, preach, educate, repress, there always comes a point in the story. . . . Who was that who spoke about 'the story'? Of course that is the whole point. There is a story, and it's the human factor which makes the story. The genius of men and women for interfering and being restless. Put away all these ideas of 'solutions.' Human life is a fluid thing, a story. It goes on and goes back, and the past is as active as the future. Where the Querrils fail is that they believe the world has only just been born, and they try and round it up as though it were a young foal."

The meditations of Decimus were disturbed by a ring at his bell. He instinctively glanced at the clock. It was twenty minutes to eleven. His man had retired to bed. A strange hour for a visitor!

He got up and walked heavily to the door. The passage was dimly lighted and he did not recognize the two figures who stood there awaiting admission. Before he had had time to speak, a man's voice called out:

"Well, now, that's real neighborly of you, Dess, to be in at this hour. We're along at the Savoy and I've brought 'herself.'"

"My dear Tony!" exclaimed the large man

and he pressed the other's hand. "Come in. I'm delighted to see you and — herself."

"Herself" shook his hand and repeated his name, "Mr. Postern," in a pretty, questioning, upward inflection. So this was Tony's wife! Dear, dear! After all these years — five years now — Here was Tony back again, and lo! dainty as a Donatello bambino, a fair, smiling, little person — just the sort of wife you would expect for Tony, with quick, intelligent eyes and vivacious manners. Charming!

"I'd no idea," Decimus was saying, as he ushered them into the room, and Tony went on:

"Yes, well, here we are. We were married in the fall, and we had a honeymoon down Colorado way. And this is a kind of extension, revisiting the glimpses of the moon. We arrived at this little old town this forenoon. After dinner we just buzzed around. Sadi has not been here before, and she's just crazy about it all. We went up the Strand and into a sideshow, but she would n't sit still. So I fetched her away, and we were going back home to the Savoy when I suddenly said, 'Why, see here, Sadi; let's just see if old Dess is hanging out in the old shanty in Adelphi; it's only two blocks away.' And so we came right along, and we found the dear old fellow waiting for us for all the world as though

he'd figured it all out. Now tell us all your glad news."

Decimus found himself being mildly but quite unreasonably surprised that Tony and his wife were not aware of the great dinner. A bewildering place, London. One can be a hero, a jolly good fellow in one spot, and a hundred yards away nobody knows or cares whether you are or not.

Tony was in a characteristic attitude. He stood in the middle of the room, holding himself very straight, and swaying slightly sideways, like a top winding itself up.

"Herself," as if to emphasize the fleeting nature of the visit, perched herself against the arm of the old Cromwellian chair, her hands buried in her muff, her chin bent down, and her limpid eyes glowing with pride at the small man, and casting friendly glances at the large one.

"I wish she would sit down," thought Decimus. But no, this was a room where people came and went, passed the time of day, borrowed books, recorded troubles, and then passed on.

#### IV

"I'm afraid my news is all very prosaic," he answered. "Books and business. A kind of

papier-mâché existence. I haven't seen the Querrils for some time."

"Ah! we reckon to go down and see old man Querril and his wife for the week-end. Later on we're going to stay with Peter and Annette at this famous villa of theirs at Pisa. Won't that be bully!"

"Old man Querril and his wife"—a significant phrase! no longer the Querrils, or the Querril family, but "old man and his wife." Decimus envied Tony at that moment with a green envy. Envied him his young wife, his buoyancy, his eyes of youth. The Querrils were not an integral part of his life. Just good friends that one could meet and love and help, and then go on and be recreated in some new experience.

Tony chatted about old times and friends, and suddenly herself said:

"Sammy dear, we must n't keep our friend up."

Why "Sammy?" — Goodness knows! No, no, you little gray bird, that's right. Don't keep the dragon from his lair. Fly away to your snug nest in the comfortable hotel, where you are all alone, you two, where all the world that matters is. Then in the cozy light put on one of those flimsy pink and lace things, and then say all the



things that matter. Be *real* neighborly then. Love him. People your world with little images of him. Love him with all your soul — for he's a good boy.

"Well, Dess, we must get together."

"Yes, yes," he found himself saying by the door. "Will you dine with me one night soon? What are your plans?"

The social conventions! How tedious it all was! The great emptiness and nothing to fill it with but dinners, and plans, and functions.

"Good night, Dess!"

"Good night, Tony!"

"Mr. Postern!" (the upward inflection of course). "I'm very pleased to have met you!"

Oh! damn! He bent over and kissed her hand in his best Georgian manner, but his heart was heavy within him.

When they had gone he went to the window and pulled back the curtain. The river lay beneath him dumbly reflecting the night sky. Barges were groping their way along on mysterious errands. Gaunt buildings and factory chimneys huddled in dark masses, as though holding up their arms to God in supplication. Right away to the east was a light in the sky, probably a fire. Perhaps at that moment buildings were crashing down, lives were being lost.



. . . Across the bridges were streams of cabs and busses, people rushing home from theaters and restaurants, returning from dubious activities. Who cared? Let the story go on. . . .

How ridiculous he was to-night! The night of a great triumph! The jolly good fellow! Success, fame. . . . It was the visit of Tony which had tipped the scale. If only "herself" had sat in the chair, and not on the arm! Of course it was very late. He was very unreasonable. But it was one of those petty things which lingers in one's imagination, moves one suddenly like an evil portent which has been there all the time, but which one has only just observed.

## V

Old Querril and his wife! What were they thinking? Old Querril, who with all his urbanity was something of an Eastern in his passivity. He did not interfere. And yet — what had been the result? Peter's terrible lapse. Perhaps if old Querril *had* interfered, been more informing and interfering. . . . And then Rodney! If old Querril had only known the true story about Rodney. Even now Decimus could see the little piggy eyes of the staff-captain, who had told him the story as he heard it from some

society woman, who had been told it confidentially by an old brigadier.

"Your son died gallantly leading his men," this was the communication sent to old man Querril. This was all he was allowed to know. But it was n't the truth. How strange that from the Querril family of all people should spring a tragic horror of interference. If Rodney had n't interfered with the Troons, Peter's fatal interference might never have materialized. If Rodney had n't interfered with an army order he might yet be alive.

For Rodney had been shot, by order of a court-martial, for acting culpably against the orders of his superior officers during action. The story was very confused. The little staff-captain with the piggy eyes had not explained it very well. He had demonstrated with salt-cellars and forks and napkins one evening at a dinner at the Café Royale. Decimus was too dazed and perturbed to follow it in detail. It amounted to the fact that during a retreat Rodney had acted deliberately against instructions. He believed his plan was better and he disobeyed. If it had been successful he would probably have been forgiven. Men have often disobeyed before and risen to great heights. But Rodney failed badly. It was a terrible mistake. He misunderstood the

bigger idea. As a result a whole company — not his own — was almost annihilated. . . .

And so on a certain morning when the first flush of light crept over the eastern sky Rodney had paid the full penalty for interference, standing with his back to the ruined wall of an old farm. There must have come to him some moment when, as Tony said, "he was all collected together." All alone he had been. He had weighed his chance, taken his quick decision — alone. And in that moment all the weaknesses and all the strength of the Querril creed must have been put to the test.

There must have been terrible seconds crowded with vivid pictures — the garden at Chessilton Heath, Peter's studio, all the shrines and niches clamoring for homage, the thousand little incidents of sentimental association, his wife, his mother, "George," the photographs, Magda, Martin — all of them, even the dogs not left out of the collection. . . .

Decimus could almost see the drawn lines of Rodney's thoughtful face as he walked between the guard. But would he falter? Not for one second. Oh! no, Tony, you may call them amateurs, but there is hope at the bottom of Pandora's box. Rodney would see the game through. His master-comfort at the end — that

the others would not know. He would be tremendously "usual," with his slightly twisted, slightly ironic, smile, and his great pride of soul. Peculiarly solicitous of the feelings of the guard, almost apologizing for giving them this early morning discomfort. And when he waited in the darkness for the greater darkness to envelop him, his attitude would be a gentle complacence that he faced this last disquieting experience alone. He would stand there with his heels together and his head thrown back as though he were saying:

"Well, God?"

Surely beyond that last bolt of physical disruption there would come to this sane and purposeful individual some solution . . . some explanation of the troubled problems of the life, a life which had left him perplexed, questioning, restless, dissatisfied?

## VI

Decimus had visualized this scene a hundred times, but to-night it was more vivid than usual. The visit of Tony had put the clock back, the presence of his pretty wife, who would only sit on the arm of the chair and was anxious to flutter away, emphasized his own emotional isolation.

But his mind was very busy; the old processes were at work. The thing was reducing itself to "terms of literature." He almost instinctively reached for the pad on his writing table and took up a fountain pen. After all, that was his job, his mission. And it had compensations. A jolly good fellow!

Poor old Querril! Even he in his way was an interferer. He was a passive interferer. One might go to old Querril and say, "Sir, your son has had two years' hard labor for seducing a young girl," and another might say to him, "Sir, I must congratulate you! Your son died gallantly for his country."

And one statement would be as effectual as the other in disturbing his opinions and affections. He did n't require a government official to tell him about his sons. He knew his sons better than they did. He would love them in his own way. If one made a terrible mistake, his mind, which was schooled to make the broadest allowances, and rather to accept the other fellow's point of view than his own, would be immediately exercised with the utmost pity and sympathy. He would be more likely to love and help a boy who had sinned — as they call it — than a boy who had achieved success. A most regrettable thing to have sinned. One must have



endured unspeakable anguish and mental discomfort.

And so old Querril was to an extent an interferer because he remained impervious to the majestic interpretations of laws, conventions, and king's regulations. He had been a passive interferer, but Rodney had been an active interferer, a Westerner, an Anglo-Saxon.

Well, well, with all their faults, they were decent people — these Westerners. Tony, John, Magda, Rodney, old Querril, Peter, all different but all very — Anglo-Saxon.

A curious race the Anglo-Saxon, restless, not quite knowing what it wants, with the genius of dissatisfaction more acutely developed than in any other race. He must crawl all over the earth and see what's doing. He has an uncontrollable impetus to see over the ridge. He must go and look at the North Pole, and the South Pole, and wade through malarial forests in Central Africa. He does n't know why, but he just has to do this. Then he returns home and after a long time thinks about it all — he's rather slow in the up-take. And then one day — or more probably one night — something starts worrying him. Those women who threw their babies in the Ganges as a religious offering. Malay slaves working in salt mines for Chinese masters.



People who mutilate themselves. And one night when the Teuton, and the Slav — and even the Latin — is sleeping soundly in his bed, he wakes up and thinks:

“No, but, damn it all! babies in the Ganges! a bit thick!”

And he finds that this disturbs his nights. And one day it gets beyond him. He suddenly packs up and goes off to interfere. He takes his golf clubs, and his ridiculous clothes, his zinc chapels, his gramophones, and his evening dress. And being a practical man, he thinks:

“Well, as I’m going, I might as well take a few pounds of tea to sell to the natives.”

And of course the malevolent person will say:

“Ah! yes, that’s what he goes for!”

But it is n’t true. Or in any case it’s only partly true. (Every one acts from mixed motives.) The principal reason is that he is driven to it by some power greater than himself. He does n’t like interfering. He’s like old Querril — he detests a situation. He likes playing games, making money, enjoying himself. But there’s always this old demon of Interference jogging his elbow. There are certain broad principles of humanity that he is driven to insist on. He has no objection to what he calls “this tomfoolery of mysticism.” People can have what

religion they like, think and act as they like, but — damn it all! babies in the Ganges!

He represents as it were a landmark in evolution, the conscience of mankind, a long, long way back from what the Querrils and their kind demand, but still a very definite and strong landmark. A decent chap!

With all his vanities and inanities, repressions, limitations, and hypocrisies, he's quite the best of the lot. He tries to play fair, and he's never satisfied. He's always grumbling and grouching. He grumbles at his successes as much as at his failures — rather more so, in fact. And at times he pays a bitter price for interference. He interferes unwisely and sometimes culpably, but still he interferes, and there's hope for a man or a woman or a state which will do that.

## VII

The pen of Decimus was busy on the pad. But he was not writing. He was drawing pigs and wolves and penguins, as these thoughts raced through his mind. He was himself again. The mood of conscious isolation had passed. He was with a very dear friend. The thing began to take shape — the very newest of the little Wedgwoods. Decimus glowed. He could see it all. It would come quite easily and be very —

popular! Not a criticism but a eulogy — in fiction form. "The man who grumbled his way to God."

They would simply love it. It would deal with low life contrasted very sharply with high life, and would preach the gospel of dissatisfaction. Children must be taught in the schools never to be satisfied. There must be a chair of dissatisfaction at Oxford, a grumbler's stool at Cambridge. Of course it must be written in a light key or else no one would read it. There would be a dedication: "To the Lady who Always Reads the Last Chapter First." Excellent!

The pen of Decimus hovered above the pad. A small moth fluttered across the room and settled on the green shade of the lamp. It ran up and down it, fluttering its wings. It appeared angry with all these modern contrivances which prevented it from fulfilling its preordained mission of self-destruction. Where were the candles of our ancestors which with simple directness beckoned us to an obvious and natural fate?

Decimus wrote "Chapter I," but his eye followed the moth. From the lampshade it made straight for the old Cromwellian chair. It dusted its wings against its side, polished by the friction of centuries. But back again it went savagely to the green light.

"You must know then that the man who grumbled his way to God was a man like you may be, or like I am — just a poor, indeterminate, unsatisfied creature with impulses for good but . . . a halting, questioning, half-believing, moral philanderer. Oh, God! wanting so much to love you and to love the world. Underneath it all — a decent fellow, the linsey woolsey fabric of his mentality . . ."

Words, words, words! Where has it gone now?

"The man who grumbled his way to God was the son of a poor carpenter who was born at . . ."

Oh! go away, little moth!

THE END



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